

明日は
1のつく
風が吹く!



Prologue

Hey, Shibuya.

I'm thankful for you saving me, but I'm telling you I'm definitely not a person who gets bullied all the time.

If it's the first time you've been cornered by bad classmates, then it's the first time you've been extorted for money.

And while I'm at it, grades are my life?! Like, high test scores and stuff? Don't go spreading stereotypical rumors when you don't know anything about me. I know that I used to fade into the background, but in order to train my body and mind, I've learned martial arts. Like karate, uh... through the mail.

Anyway! Even I don't even know what kind of person I am so please stop making conjectures about me.

And anyway, knowing the kind of person you really are is an eternal mystery to mankind, right? That's why self-exploration books are always best sellers.

So, I'll try asking you.

What about you?

Why were you born and why are you alive?

Ah! Don't get all absorbed in thought! Nobody knows that sort of thing.

明日は マのつく 風が吹く!

アニシナ

【フォンカーベルニコフ卿
アニシナ】

天上天下唯我独尊。
日夜、過酷な実験に
いそしむ
マッドマジカリスト。

コンラッド

【ウェラー卿コンラート】

前魔王の次男で、
ユーリの名付親。
軽やかな性格と柔軟な
思考を併せもつ好青年。

ユーリ

【渋谷有利】

正義感と負けん気
が人一倍つよい高校生。
このたびめでたく
第27代魔王に就任。
主人公。

Tomo Takabayashi
illust. Temari Matsumoto

登場人物紹介

ギンター

【フォンクライスト卿
ギンター】

王佐、つまり魔王の
教育係としてユーリに
仕える貴族。
過保護は愛ゆえか。

ヴォルフラム

【フォンビーレフェルト卿
ヴォルフラム】

前魔王の三男。
わがままブー。
ひょんなことから
ユーリの婚約者に。

グウェンタール

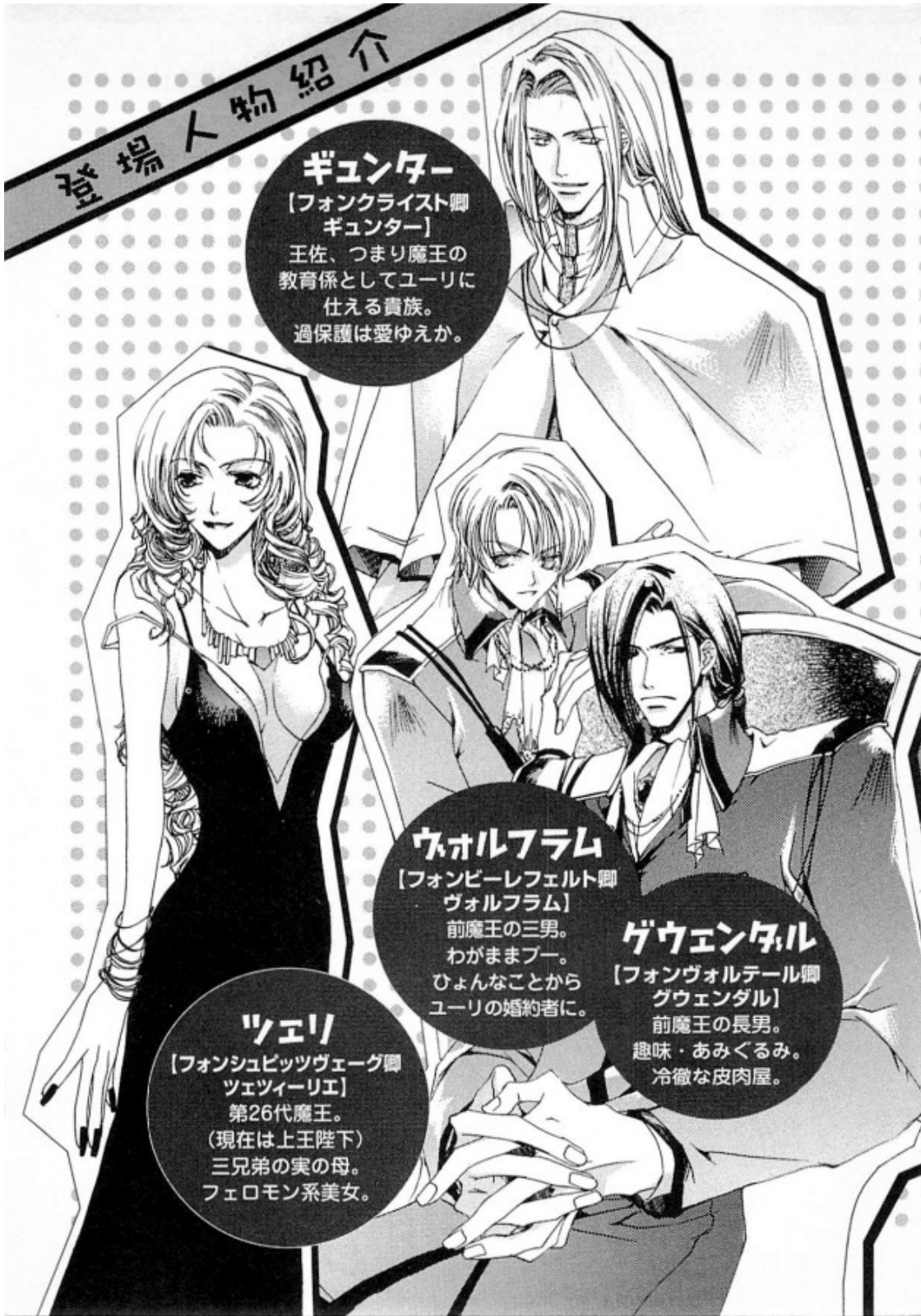
【フォンヴォルテール卿
グウェンタール】

前魔王の長男。
趣味・あみぐるみ。
冷徹な皮肉屋。

ツェリ

【フォンシュビッツヴェーク卿
ツェツィーリエ】

第26代魔王。
(現在は上王陛下)
三兄弟の実の母。
フェロモン系美女。



Chapter 1

Have I drowned? Is that why it's so hard to breathe!?

"Ugh... Bando, Eiji, you bastards..."

"Please wake up, Your Majesty."

Even though it's morning, peering at me is Lord Weller, his usual charming self without puffy eyes or tousled hair.

"Don't call me Your Majesty. You named me."

"Sorry, it just slipped out. But the alarm bird has cried three times already."

"Really!?"

According to my G-Shock, which is still continuing to valiantly keep the time, it is currently 8 o'clock in the morning. By the way, it's also November 30th and the first month of winter in this world. One day here seems to be 24 hours, and there isn't any noticeable deviance in their clocks. So that means that the size and rotation of this planet is about the same as Earth... ah, I can't really understand complicated things.

Anyway, it's been almost 120 days since I went with Ken Murata to Sea World because he was rejected by a girl, shook hands with a dolphin named Bando, went on a Star Tours, and got sucked into this swords-and-magic world.

Because this was the third time I've come to this country, it's about time I was considered a regular. Even if everything hadn't gone well, I somehow managed to solve the designated problem and was completely ready and waiting to return to modern Japan – I even changed into normal boxer-type underwear.

However...

As I was struggling to get up, Conrad rubs the corner of my eye with his thumb.

"Were you dreaming of Bando again?"

"Yeah."

... I wasn't able to go back.

I wasn't able to go back to the Japan where I wasn't Yuuri(Helping Village) or Yuuri(Gentle Pear Tree) or Yuuri(Distant Lapis Lazuli)(1), where I heard the familiar 'Shibuya Yuuri Harajuku Furi, where I was the organizer of a grass-lot baseball team even though I was just a high school student, where I was captain and Number 8 and the designated catcher.

"... Even though it's already been four months... Ah! Now's not the time to be worrying about that! I thought it was hard to breathe! He's completely on top of me!"

Wolfram von Bielefeld, with the sleeping face of an angel and the sleeping habits of a devil, has got both his arms and legs wrapped around me, disturbing my peaceful sleep. He had on a frilly-laced, silk nightgown.

"This isn't funny. If Günter saw this..."

"I'm already here!"

Lord von Christ is yelling as he bangs on the thick, heavy wooden door. His pretty face is probably distorted in unease and impatience, his hair in a disarray.

"You're Majesty! What has happened, Your Majesty!? Please open the door! Please open the door-!"

My body guard, who has taken the position of ally and protector, rolls over the half-awake Wolfram.

"I locked the door, just in case."

"Awesome, Conrad! You saved me."

I quickly put on my custom training wear. It has a design that you only see on variety shows on TV – green with two thick white stripes down the side – and the lack of elasticity is a bit troubling, but it's easier to move around in than my black school uniform.

I burst through the door, uttering a quick "I'm going running" to Gunter and slipped past him. Behind me, I hear a girlish shriek.

"Why are you in His Majesty's room!? And in his bed!"

Leaving the soon-to-be scene of carnage behind me, even I have to wonder about that.

"Why *is* Wolf living with me? In this huge place, there should at least be one or two guest rooms."

No before that, why is he even living here at Blood Pledge Castle? His headquarters should be in the Bielefeld region. This place with the creepy name is supposed to be my castle. That's right. This completely normal baseball kid, Yuuri Shibuya, was made the ruler of a country just before his 16th birthday. And not your normal king, either. While it's true that I laughed a bit at the King of Japanese Rock, my title is even more impressive. (2) I was just supposed to be a normal high school student with my completely average height and completely average appearance and even my completely average intelligence...

But I was the Demon King.

After being unbelievably and miraculously flushed down a toilet, being randomly surrounded by good-looking guys, and being told that 'starting today, you are the Demon King,' anyone would think that they were dreaming. I thought so, too. If this is a dream, let me wake up quickly. I prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed some more to someone called the True King to let me go back to my reality.

But I'm past that.

I have no time to be depressed. I have a mountain of documents I need to sign and endless problems to think about. I have to meet so many important people you could make a huge line of them like at a popular store. And of course, I can't skip my daily training. When your occupation is the Demon King, your body is your wealth.

Seeing such an exemplary king, my tutor and royal advisor Günter has been busy crying and being ecstatic. Well, since I'm a guy whose brain seems to just be made out of muscle (a Muscle-Brain Guy, for short), the one who's been doing all the miscellaneous work is him.

I've been slowly learning how to read and write. Right now I'm at the level of an accomplished three-year old, but I've been able to read complicated words in book titles that I haven't learned yet just by running my finger along them. Maybe it was like in the propaganda in those English class flyers that say you'll suddenly find your talent like a flower blooming or something.

Stepping off the grey stairs and into the courtyard, I start running before the guards have time to pay their respects. Bathed in the morning light, the wintry lawn was sparkling. Under the grass, there were little icicles. My breaths are white and even the tips of my clenched fingers are getting numb and breathing in the clear, cold air hurt my nose so much my eyes teared up.

"You alright?" Conrad asked shortly, running beside me. He asks that same question every once in a while.

"Why do you ask? I'm fine?"

The blue stone swaying at my chest is making me colder. With intricate silverwork and a color bluer than the sky, this Lion's Blue magic stone helps me remember my responsibilities (3).

It wasn't forced on me. I chose it of my own will.

I was born with the soul of a Demon King, and I have promised to protect this country.

I promised.

After taking my usual course and returning to the castle, I heard a commotion on the way to grab a change of clothes so I could take a bath before breakfast,

"Are Wolf and Günter still fighting..?"

"Your Majesty!"

With a boyish short haircut that matched her wheat-colored tan, reddish brown eyes that were squinted in a smile, and was otherwise pretty much like a sunflower, a young girl came rushing over. Judging from her size, the baby in her stomach was doing well.

"Nicola, you came."

"It's been a while! Have you been well, Your Majesty?"

She was the bride of a demon despite being human and looked a bit like Ryouko Hirose. (4) About four months ago, we were mistaken for each other and ended up in a lot of trouble. But in the end, she decided to give birth to her child in her husband's homeland and I ended up saving a lot of women. I also got my hands on the recorder-like Demon Flute so I guess all's well that ends well.

"Saying he was going to the capitol on business, His Excellency brought me along. It's strange how he's so nice to me despite how angry he is at Hube.

By 'His Excellency' she means Gwendal von Voltaire, the cousin of Nicola's husband Lord Gegenhuber Grisela. He has hair that's so dark grey it's almost black, blue eyes that no beautiful woman would ever be able to remove the grumpy look from, a deep booming voice, and an appearance that is the very image of a proper Demon King. Half a year ago, this man was the Crown Prince as the eldest son under the rule of Her Prior Majesty the Demon King, Cecilie von Spitzweg.

Both Wolfram von Bielefeld, who is currently occupying half of my room, and Lord Conrart Weller, who is also my training partner, are both sons of the Pheromone Queen Celi despite all having different fathers. I've been calling them the three demon brothers who look nothing alike, but lately that claim has been challenged.

The third son has a build similar to mine, looks just like his mother with long eyelashes, blonde hair, emerald green eyes that remind me of the bottom of a lake, and is the very image of a perfect pretty boy from an orthodox school – like an angel that comes to you in a dream and makes you cry from his whispered gospel. But in reality he's a spoiled brat and if he opens his mouth, what comes out isn't any kind of heavenly gospel.

Lady Celi, as an advocate of free love, got married to a human who had nothing of worth other than his sword and gave birth to her second son, Conrad. In the middle of these pretty people, he leaves a rather plain impression, but I've heard he's quite popular with the ladies.

He's attractive without being too pretty, good-natured, and a skilled swordsman. On top of that, as a result of something in the past, it seems he's hiding the heart of a lion within him. Of course the girls can't leave him alone. Although if I was a girl, I'd have to pass up this over-accomplished man.

My tutor, Günter von Christ, is the exact opposite. He has grey hair that reaches his back and violet eyes that are brimming with intelligence. Any woman would be taken down immediately if he spoke to them softly with his attractive baritone voice. But the true character of this absolute beauty was unbelievable. Due to some bizarre aesthetic sense, he admires the likes of me to point of breaking down beyond repair. As the king, I'm worried about how far he'll go.

Already halfway to the breaking point, Günter was vehemently arguing with the disrespectful Wolfram.

"As I've been asking, why are you living in His Majesty's room!?"

"Yuuri's proposed to me, remember? It's decided that he would want to share a bedroom." It's *not* decided.

The beauty countered that desperately with a flip of his hair.

"A fiancé is at best a fiancé, not a partner or a spouse! Spending the night together before exchanging marriage vows is, is, is shameful!"

Wolfram pushed his tangled bangs up.

"Well there's an almost 150 year old for you. What an outdated thing to say!"

Says the 82 year old. Not wanting to get involved in that troublesome mess, I didn't say that out loud. Demon blood extends the life of the demons so they're all about five times older than they look. For a boy who's just about to turn 16, it feels like a gathering of super old people.

Conrad just shrugged in his training wear, not getting involved in their argument.

"No need to get so worked up over just sleeping together..." (5)

"Before that, can someone please notice that we're both men!?"

"Aren't you two mistaken? His Majesty already has His Excellency Gwendal." Nicola innocently interjected while she placed a hand on her belly.

"*That* is the biggest mistake of them all!"

I'm simultaneously denying all three of their opinions. As the only outsider, Lord Weller is desperately trying not to laugh. Stop that Conrad. Your one and only baseball partner is being forced into a fraudulent marriage... Wait, rather than a fraudulent marriage, is it gender misrepresentation? Ah, if only Wolfram was a girl... but then he'd still be a spoiled brat...

A few dull thuds came from the knocker on my doors and Conrad opened one side. A soldier in charge of guarding the main gate was standing there.

"Excuse me, sir!"

"What is it?"

"Well, I know it's not public visiting hours to meet with His Majesty but..!"

"You don't have to be so formal. I don't mind if you just say what you need to say."

"Yes sir! Excuse me!"

I'm not sure if I just made him more uncomfortable, but his knees have started shaking.

"Someone requesting an audience with Your Majesty has arrived at the castle gates."

"Ah, is that all? After breakfast, I'll have them added in my schedule."

The aide, or rather the royal advisor Günter, with a dependable voice completely different than a minute ago, steps in between me and the soldier.

"Those sort of request go through me."

"Well, but... um, it's of a very personal nature... so if possible, um, can everyone leave?"

The young man took in his surroundings. His face went completely red by just being glared at by Günter and Wolfram. If the two of us were left alone, he'd probably faint from the sudden pressure. Before that happened, Conrad encouraged him in a gentle voice.

"It's alright. We're all close-lipped."

"Then I'll say it."

The soldier fell quiet for a moment and swallowed before continuing in a high voice.

"Someone who says, no, claims to be the royal bastard of the ruler of The Great Demon Kingdom, the absolute leader of us demons, the 27th Demon King, has requested an audience!"

"Royal bastard?"

What's that? As I turned to Conrad to ask, Wolfram grabbed me by my collar.

"Yuuri, you jerk, where did you give birth!? Where and when, when did that happen!?"

"Wh-what? I didn't give birth! I definitely did not give birth!"

Being assaulted by this angelic pretty boy, I feel like confessing to anything.

"If you didn't give birth, then where did you make it!"

"I di- ugh, I didn't make anything! In the first place, what is a royal bastard!?"

"The child between a noble and a woman that he is not married to."

"Ahh, like the illegitimate child that the emperor has hidden away like in period dramas.

That's right, the hidden child of the emperor would cause a riot. It'd make deciding the heir super difficult... wait, what? Me? The one with the hidden child who's the royal bastard of the noble is me!?"

"That's how it seems."

Standing next to the completely calm Conrad, my tutor fell flat on his back. His eyes have rolled all the way back in his head from shock.

"Ah, Günter!"

"What is the meaning of this! You've done something so lewd behind my back! This is why I keep calling you a flirt!"

He's started shaking me by my green jersey.

"W-w-wait! Please stop sh-sha-shaking my brain! Li-like I'd have a hidden child after sixteen years of b-being unpopular..."



“Wow, Yuuri! And you look like you wouldn’t kill a fly.”

Nicola, that's not the right word for that metaphor.

Günter, still on the floor, has started convulsing.

"Even if I killed mosquitoes or cockroaches I wouldn't father a child!"

"And, this person claiming to be the illegitimate child is where?" My amazing bodyguard calmly prompts the soldier-turned-news-bearer. He definitely believes that there's no way the king could have a hidden child. Either that or he learned how undesirable someone like I was while in America or somewhere.

"Actually... they're already here... They had a Great Demon Kingdom insignia that only the previous Demon Kings and their relatives can inherit so it seemed improper to not let them pass..."

What's that? Is that like a commemorative championship ring that's only given to the winning baseball team from the regular season? Perhaps having his interest piqued by the soldier's words, the hands of my 'dear' fiancé loosen from my neck.

"The insignia?"

"Hey, what is that? If it's the Demon King and their relatives, does that mean that you have one, being Lady Celi's son?"

"I've taken my father's name so I didn't inherit one. My older brother had one though. The 7th Demon King, King Folger, was once head of the Voltaire family."

After hearing a name that sounded like it would come up in a history book, Günter jumped up like he had been shocked. For someone who's around 150, he's got some awesome abdominal muscles.

"If so, that brat... no, royal bastard candidate, is not the king's child! As His Majesty isn't even 16 yet and has only been the Demon King for a very short time, not even the sketches for his insignia have been created yet."

In modern Japan, it was summer vacation and I was absorbed in my grass-lot baseball. Right before my 16th birthday, I went on a Star Tours with a dolphin named Bando. Therefore, for me it was like I was still 15 years and 364 days old.

"Then whose, what house's seal do they have... ah, don't tell me you guys have another brother or something!?"

It must be troubling to have to worry about these sort of things with a beautiful mother who is generous with her love. Perhaps worrying that this might become his problem, Wolfram jogged to the doors and threw them both open.

"Who is it..."

Nothing met his gaze. The person in question was much farther down, their head just barely reaching his hips.

They had short, curly, reddish-brown hair that didn't cover their ears and a small puckered mouth. Perhaps because they were in a serious situation, they stood stiffly and their olive skin was pale. Like on a rerun from a drama ten years ago, their thick eyebrows and long eyelashes were manly.

With my human-observation-speed-gun, I quickly check the child's appearance.

Gender: unknown. Nationality: unknown. Role in Karaoke parties: unknown.

My observational skills suck. Well, their age is probably around ten.

"Wait, what? That kid's around ten, right? How old was I when they were born? You do

know I was six years old ten years ago!? If I was six then I was in first grade! A first grader might be able to make a hundred friends but not a child, right!? This is definitely wrong! They're definitely not my child..."

With a deep breath, the ten year old put some strength in their legs and kicked off of the floor, closing the distance between us.

"Father!"

"F... father!?"

Without even the time to enjoy the feeling of becoming a daddy (I don't want to enjoy that yet), they come bouncing at me like a soccer ball. Contrary to the current situation, I spread my arms, but the child has their arms at their right side.

In contrast to the sun, there was a momentary glint of steel.

What?

"Your Majesty!"

Turning my body away because of the bad feeling I got without even knowing what the glint was, I lost my balance and fell sideways, slamming my back and right wrist. The silver light slid across the ground like it was crawling and stopped at the feet of Wolfram who was still standing in the doorway. There was a light sound of something thin and metallic.

"Your Majesty! Oh how horrible... Your Majesty, are you injured?"

"What, what happened? Why did I fall? Why did I lose my balance?"

In reality, there was no reason to dodge the attack. Before the culprit accomplished their goal, Conrad had quickly stepped in between us and slapped the blade out of the child's hand. Günter has crouched over me and begun patting down my body.

"If there are any injuries on this beautiful body..."

"I'm fine... and stop touching places that have nothing to do with my fall."

Over my tutor's shoulder, I can see the young soldier binding the arms of the child. His face was completely pale from the severity of the situation.

"I, there is no excuse for my actions! To think, to think that the child was an assa... To attempt such an outrageous thing..."

"Assassin? I was almost assassinated!?"

In English that would be a hitman. In Japanese, "My Lord, I have come for your life." I'd thought that sort of work was for professionals, not children. Like a ninja or Golgo. (6)

Günter made a proclamation made all the more dreadful by his beauty.

"Regardless of the young age of the perpetrator, an act of high treason against His Majesty the Demon King is a serious crime that is unforgivable. They must be put to death. Their head should be mounted on a pike or we should have them paraded about town before being put to the flame..."

"Hey wait, hold up on those punishments you only hear of in period dramas! They're still just an elementary school student! There's no way an elementary student would just come up with an assassination plot on their own! They may just be being used by someone who brainwashed them!"

If I left it alone it seemed like he would just do it on his own, so in order to stop Günter I tried to stand.

"Ow."

A pain raced along my right ankle and I fell back to the floor.

"Ah, maybe I twisted it."

Slightly arching his eyebrow with the old scar, Conrad takes off my shoes. My ankle was swelling before his eyes.

"Aw man... I twisted my ankle."

"Oh how dreadful! Your poor Majesty, if there's anything I can do for you I would gladly do it!"

"It's not like I'm mid-season or anything. I can just let it slowly heal... ouch."

"Forgive me. I was just checking if it was only a sprain."

Sweeping his slightly disarrayed grey hair into order, Günter made a declaration very fitting for a capable royal advisor.

"Call the kingdom's best doctor to the castle as soon as possible!"

At the same time, the second son spoke to the soldier in a calm voice, eyes still facing downwards.

"Send for Gisela. Also, keep a watch on that child."

The soldier gave a bow and ran out. Despite his youth, he can tell which order was appropriate.

(1) This is just a list of some of the more common kanji used to write 'Yuuri' that he has, in the past, wished were used to write his own name. Personally, I thought they were a bit girly, but I've been assured by my Japanese linguist friend that they are indeed unisex if read as 'Yuuri.' They only get girly if you read them as 'Yuri.' Incidentally, they can *all* be read as 'Yuri' whereas the kanji actually used to write his name can only really be read as 'Yuuri' in case anyone is interested in that random info. I'm a linguistics major so I *love* random info like that XD

(2) He's referring to [this guy](#). He sings rock songs directly translated to Japanese. Directly. Even if the words don't really fit all that well XD

(3) Baseball! The Seibu Lions's color blue.

(4) An actress/singer. She was Jean Reno's daughter in Luc Besson's film, Wasabi. She was also in Departures but that movie didn't exist yet ;p

(5) Conrad uses a word here that specifically means a non-sexy kind of sleeping together: zakone. When you hear zakone, you immediately think of a bunch of your friends sleeping all over your floor in a slumber party kind of situation. I honestly couldn't think of a way of translating this without it either sounding sexy or turning his brief comment into a long, convoluted monster. So, I settled on sexy XD

(6) Golgo 13 is a manga about a professional assassin of the same name. It's been serialized since 1969 and is the oldest manga still in publication.

The more you know! ☺☆

* * * * *

I climbed the gently sloping hill road while swaying on the back of a horse.

The afternoon air was hot enough to make me sweat under my jacket. I hadn't expected to wear a down jacket in a sword and magic world.

But now that I think about it, there are both birds and cloth here so it isn't really all that strange for down jackets to be a favored way to protect against the cold. Although there might be a flaw in the design because it's as heavy as a leather jacket. That makes it pointless.

Although it's only about as arduous a climb as would come up in an elementary school trip, the men who pass us all greet us with one hand like they're following a rule of mountain men or something. There were a few who were startled when they noticed the color of my hair and eyes hidden under my hood, but strangely they all nod in understanding once Conrad gives them a sign to be quiet. Maybe they think we're ninjas.

"Everyone's walking. I want to get down and walk, too."

"When your ankle is completely healed."

Lord Weller made a quick addition to this statement while keeping his gaze forward.

"It's fine; it's only for now. You'll be able to run around just like before in no time."

"I know but..."

The ankle that I fell on and twisted no longer hurts and isn't swelled up anymore. However, I'm still worrying whether it will go back to before or whether I'll only be unable to run for right now.

I'm despairing that the day will never come when it gets back to normal.

The one who came running without even a first-aid kit to check my injuries was a sickly pale girl. This girl with skin so pale it was bluish and a dainty figure that didn't match her military outfit squatted down next to me without so much as a greeting and placed my right leg on her lap. Except for my injury, every inch of my unpopular, 16 year old high school body heated up. Not even the girl manager in the baseball club did that for me. (1)

"It's fine, it's just twisted."

It's strange to say this about a demon, but the female soldier smiled like the Virgin Mary. Her green eyes crinkled.

"... Have we met before?"

Even though it sounds like some crappy pick up line, she answers unoffended.

"I'm afraid that Your Majesty has dirtied his hands at my place of work before. You shared your compassionate heart without caring if they were enemy or friend."

"Ah!"

While that compliment was so embarrassing it made me feel like a bridegroom at a wedding, this girl named Gisela was definitely a combat medic on that day. She was the girl from the healing hands tribe that was working in the field hospital the first time I was called to this world.

"Well Your Majesty, may I have your hand?"

"Ah, uh sure."

"... The first time I met Your Majesty I was very surprised. Someone who had noble black hair and eyes was standing right before me and was helping to treat both demons and humans

indiscriminately.”

Like there was a huge heart there or something, the aching in my ankle receded in waves. The heat in my body converged in a straight line in my arm and seemed to be flowing out of my left hand into her palm as she held it.

“What’s happening... It’s like the pain and swelling is going away.”

“This is the ability of our tribe. We touch the patient while speaking to their heart and whisper a spell deep into their body and spirit which raises the speed of recovery... in order to do that, we need to draw out the patient’s desire to heal and give them energy. That’s why we need to be able to lightheartedly sing a lullaby to even those patients who are on the verge of death.”

“Oh wow, you’re right. It’s slowly going back to normal! This would be really handy during a game. I feel like I definitely want one of you on my team.”

She smiles at me lovingly like a mother would a child.

“With Your Majesty’s immense power, this level of technique would be simple.”

“Really? Even easier than water snakes and bone swarms and mud giants?”

For a moment, the combat medic had a look on her face that said “the hell are those?”

My tutor has been pacing in front of the door where Conrad was attempting to calm him down.

“As I thought, we should have called the best doctor... to trust the leg of His Majesty to someone like Gisela...”

“Your concern for His Majesty is commendable, but Gisela has healed patients with injuries ranging from bruises to severe sword wounds. It should be fine to trust her with something as trivial as a sprain. You should have some faith in your daughter.”

“Yeah that’s right Günter, for a sports-minded high school boy like me, getting treated by a girl doctor ranks up in my top 3 situations. Even if she is your daughter... Daughter!?”

Perhaps it was because I was so happy to have my injured leg resting on the lap of a girl while being treated, but I became flustered as I tried to figure out just who was who.

“Daughter!? Uh, um, er Gisela is Günter’s? But you really don’t look that much older than... Ah, wait you can’t tell how old people are by looking at them. But what’s up with that, having such an old daughter. The one with a hidden child is you, not me. Ah well I guess you aren’t hiding her. But I didn’t know you had a child!”

Since Gisela had started smiling in amusement, I turned to her and kept chattering on.

“And she’s a daughter that’s excellently skilled and beautiful and there’s nothing about her to complain about. As her dad I’d be worried out of my mind every day that some boring dude would move in on her. But now that I think about it, Günter’s at an age where it would be a given that he’s married and has children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. What comes after great grandchildren?”

“Great great grandchildren?” Conrad supplied.

“Yeah, great great grandchildren. Hey, why do you even know that?”

Next to Conrad, my tutor was standing still in a startled position. It looked like his shoulders were dislocated and a flood of tears and snot was flowing down his face. The lips he had pressed together were trembling.

“Wh-what’s wrong?”

“I am not married.”

“Huh? Ah, then you’re a single father? Wow, you’ve got courage to do that nowadays! But getting divorced once or twice is considered a badge of honor among men. Women say that men who’ve struck out once are mellowed out and it’s listed as something on dating sites or whatever.”

“I haven’t been divorced either! Why are you saying something so mean!? You know that I am devoted to Your Majestyyyyy!

“I’m his adopted daughter,” Gisela said clearly in a gentle voice as she rubbed my ankle.

“Huh?”

“My father died when I was young and my mother was weak from illness. In order for me to attend a proper school, His Excellency’s mother graciously arranged my adoption. So, we’re not blood related and we don’t resemble each other.”

Well, whether they’re genetically related or not, the fact that Lord von Christ has a child is undeniable. And what’s most unforgiveable is that he never introduced me to this awesome working beauty. I mean, she’s a female doctor and a nurse and a soldier! Every man has dreamed of this at least once. Although if you asked me what that dream is about, I wouldn’t be able to answer.

“Alright! From now on I’m calling Günter ‘Papa.’ And I’ll ask ‘Papa, how’s your daughter?’ and stuff like that.”

“Since I’m a member of your troops, you don’t have to ask my stepfather about things like that as I’ll come whenever you summon me. Anyway, the treatment is finished.”

The pale female soldier gave my ankle a pat.

“Now you just need to keep off of your feet for two weeks.”

“Huh, it’s not healed?”

“She’s made your body work harder than it should so it’s a bit more brittle than if we had let it heal on its own. We’ve considered everything. Please be at ease. Your Majesty’s care will be taken care of by me, Günter. I will not hinder you in any way.”

“Wait, you don’t need to make such a big deal about it. Am I going to be bedridden? What level of care am I going to be placed under!?”

“No, it’s alright if you just went on as usual. However, when you walk...” With her nurse smile, Gisela holds out a rod. “Please use this.”

“A... a cane?”

“That’s right. It’s called Windpipe No. 1”

“Huh? You named the cane?”

And ‘Windpipe No. 1,’ at that. Maybe it’s a cane that’s supported countless patients and is a prized creation of a skilled craftsman. Now that I think about it, it’s brown and has a sharp and classy shape with a T-shaped handle and it looks fairly dignified, all in all. Hey wait, this shape looks familiar. This is just like my grandfather’s favorite cane. In other words, it’s an old man stick.

“... Ugh, I’m a young man with a walking stick...”

“With that, you’ll be walking slick like an English gentleman.”

Conrad, I can’t tell if that’s a pun or if you’re actually trying to cheer me up. (2)

Thinking that it might do something like turn into a machine gun or it had some cool hidden trick, I pulled on the handle like a corkscrew.

It came off with a 'pop!'

"... Flowers come out of it."

"Wow, you're great!"

In short, I got really depressed and Lord Weller took pity on me and brought me out of the castle. After leaving town and riding for about thirty minutes, the fallow farmlands ended and all that was left was a single road leading to the mountains.

It's been about an hour since we started climbing this well-maintained mountain road. Suddenly, there was a break in the trees and we got a clear view of the winter sky.

"You can get down now. Take care not to hurt your ankle."

Grasping the cane I haven't gotten used to, I put my weight on my left hand and tried walking. I think I can handle this.

The summit was a viewing platform and was surrounded by sturdy looking guard railings. The wind was freezing, but there are a number of tourists checking out the sights anyway.

"Wow! This kind of makes me remember my school trip! We had lunch at the park on Mt. Tenran."

"Be careful. Remember to use Windpipe No. 1."

"I know. Ahhh, if you come all the way to the summit of a mountain, you definitely have to make an echo."

With one hand, I make a sort of half megaphone and take in a deep breath. Some kids nearby were about to do the same.

"Ya-"

"Uffooooon!"

After a moment, the echo comes back.

What's that!? The remaining '-hho' gets stuck in my throat. When the children yelled, everyone else joined in loudly. It was an 'uffoon' heaven.

"Why'd they yell *that*?"

"It's the preferred shout for a summit. What do you shout in Japan?"

"We use 'yahho!'"

"Well, there's nothing sexy about that either."

What would be the point of an echo having sex appeal? Hey wait, if that's the case then where does 'ahhan' stand!? (3)

An old lady who had finished her echoing a while ago glances from my cane to my face before coming over.

"Oh what a shame, boy. You've got a bad leg even though you're young. You should face that way and pray. The Shrine of the True King and the castle are in that direction so your prayers will definitely be heard."

"Uh, thank you for your concern."

I *came* from over there, though.

But I can't admit that so I go over to the fence and look down on where I was instructed to.

Past the long mountain road is the capitol and Blood Pledge Castle, protected by the castle gates.

"Are you cold?"

"I'm fine."

I'm handed a silver cup smaller than my palm that has an amber liquid inside. Without thinking, I take a sip and my mouth is set on fire.

"Hey, this is alcohol!"

"I figured it would warm you up. You're going to be sixteen soon, so you should start getting used to it."

"Hey, you know Japanese aren't allowed to drink alcohol until they're 20! Well, even if that law wasn't in place, I'd never do anything that would lower my chances of growing in any way shape or form."

"I see, in Japan, you're considered of age at 20. In this country, you become an adult at 16."

"At 16? Isn't that fast?"

"I wonder. There's nothing to compare it to."

But taking into consideration the calculations to get their real age, wouldn't that mean they'd still only have the body of a three year old? A coming of age ceremony with all three year olds. Three year olds voting. The problem might even extend all the way to the voting booths themselves. It's making me as nervous as when my parents sent me out on my first errand.

As if he's seen through my thoughts, Conrad gives an awkward smile.

"I can't say my growth was unusual for a demon, but perhaps because I have some different blood in me, I aged the same as a human until age 12. After that my growth was a lot slower, though. Wolfram is from an ancient and pure line of demons so at his ceremony, he still looked like a child. Let's see, he was about the same as that so-called royal bastard girl from this morning."

"That was a girl!?"

"You didn't notice?"

Just like a popular guy, he's quick at checking people out.

But thinking of a 10 year old Wolfram, I can only imagine an angel from a religious painting. He'd definitely have looked good with wings and a halo.

"In this country, you decide your future on your 16th birthday. In other words, how you intend to live for the rest of your life. Will you take a vow as a soldier, or will you seek prosperity as a civilian? Or, will you protect the souls of the great ones before us and choose a life of prayer? There comes a point in everyone's life when they must choose. Gwen and Wolf had to choose between their mother and father's name and I, at the age of 16, chose to live as a demon... not as a human."

Leaning on the rail, he was gazing at something far past the scenery. Not hearing any regret in his voice, I hid my relieved sigh. Because if he wanted to leave the kingdom, I wouldn't be able to stop him.

"Gisela must have chosen to live as an adopted daughter of the von Christ family at 16. Once in a lifetime, there's a point where everything else that comes to pass hinges on a single decision you must make. For demons, that point is their 16th birthday."

The Shrine of the True King, standing behind Blood Pledge Castle, is right at my eye level. It has fires burning noon, night, summer and winter, and it's said they are never put out. I wonder if it's just like the old woman said and if I pray in that direction everything will be resolved. But, what do I want? It feels like something I shouldn't wish for.

As my footing started to get unsteady, I was overcome with a bad feeling. Something

admirable just comes out of my mouth.

“... I should hurry up and turn 16 then.”

“Why?”

“I feel like Günter will freak out soon, if not.”

“Oh, he’ll do nothing of the sport.” (4)

..... What?

I feel like the temperature suddenly dropped.

“W- what did you say just now?”

Seeing Conrad opening his mouth, I was struck with an ominous feeling. I shook my head roughly and waved my hands back and forth. It seems like my body was rejecting this too.

“Ah, no that’s fine! You don’t have to say it again!”

“You seemed a bit down so I figured I’d try and make you laugh.”

“Ahh, I see. So that’s what it was.”

I’d thought it was strange for a guy to be this perfect. He’s got a good face, voice and personality and it can easily be said that he’s talented and clever. He’s got a troubled past and doesn’t have children nor has he been divorced. A young man that perfect couldn’t be real, no, in fact they shouldn’t exist. I secretly thought he must have a serious flaw somewhere and was keeping it secret. Like, he had severe athlete’s foot so his socks had a raging stench when he peeled them off or when he took off his clothes his chest hair was like a beast. Or maybe even his charming smile was actually just veneers.

But it seems his flaw wasn’t any of that, but catastrophically lame gags.

“Conrad, you don’t ever have to think you need to cheer me up ever again. Do you understand? Not even if the world is ending.”

If I have to listen to bone-chillingly lame jokes like that all the time, this winter will be record-breakingly severe.

“That’s not fair after messing up one time. Please give me another chance.”

“O-o-okay f-f-fine! One time! Just *one* time!”

“Are you ready? He’ll do nothi-“

The same thing!?

“AHH! Forget it! I’m good now! The only thing not good is my leg!”

“Then shall we make your leg good as well?”

Leaning on the rough fence with a just-got-some-veneers, nice-guy smile, Lord Weller bent forward slightly. Even though no one was listening, he lowers his voice like he’s telling me his plans for a prank.

“In order for sprains to not become a habit, maybe we should disappear for a while?”

“Disappear where?”

Using a word that’s not very demon-like, he says something that hints at his stay in America.

“To rehab.”

- (1) School sports team managers in Japan are different than their western counterparts. Their main duties are to keep score, wash the player's uniforms, keep their equipment in order, etc. and it is almost exclusively a girl's job.
- (2) The original exchange was "... Ugh, I'm a young man living with the aid of a stick (sutekki)" "It's wonderful (suteki), just like an English gentleman, Your Majesty." I tried *really* hard to think of another pun to put in there that would sound just as possibly-accidental as the original sentence. I kinda suck at that kind of thing, though, so I think it's a bit awkward ^-^;;
- (3) Uffoon (uffun) and ahhan are stereotypical sexy noises. I would have made English versions of this, but uh, that didn't work out so well XD Anyway, basically it's like everyone on the mountain is yelling out sexy noises. Takabayashi-sensei, you scandalous, *scandalous* lady ;)
- (4) This is the infamous Alaska joke. Just to keep the 'Alaska,' I was thinking of using 'Alaska'm to be patient' but that was just **way** too good of a pun for Conrad's standards (jk, it's pretty lame, too XD). Also, if you say it, it's kind of hard to tell that it's a pun. Go on, try it. I wouldn't realize that was a joke unless I saw it written. ... I hope the fangirls don't kill me for changing that o.o

Chapter 2

For demons, the 16th birthday is a complicated day filled with both pride and fear.

Before being considered an adult, you are stood in front of a bunch of important people and made to answer detailed questions and demands at a ceremony. Some children, not being ready emotionally, are not even able to complete the ceremony. Being born into the ten noble families means that the examination is that much more relentless. Suffering hours of harassment... there is no one who can say that they made no mistakes during their rite of passage.

So, no matter how many years pass, no one can ever forget that terrible occasion.

Everyone has memories of that day that are so embarrassing that, till the day they die, their faces will get so red they can literally catch on fire just from remembering them.

It's a story from long ago, but Anissina von Karbelnikoff had such a 'disgrace' as well.

"That time was very disagreeable."

She whipped around so suddenly that her flaming red hair made a snap like it hit something. Her slightly upturned, light blue eyes were brimming with curiosity and self assuredness.

"Three of the witnesses started crying."

Breaking out into a cold sweat like a mouse being stared at by a cat, Gwendal von Voltaire yelled, "What!? What did you do!?" Only in his mind, though.

"No matter how touching my declaration of devotion and service to my country was, it was still just a kid's childish ideas. To take it so seriously..."

"What did you tell them?"

"My plans for reorganizing the central bureaucracy and also about my current invention, the magic-powered meat grinder machine."

"... Oh, that..."

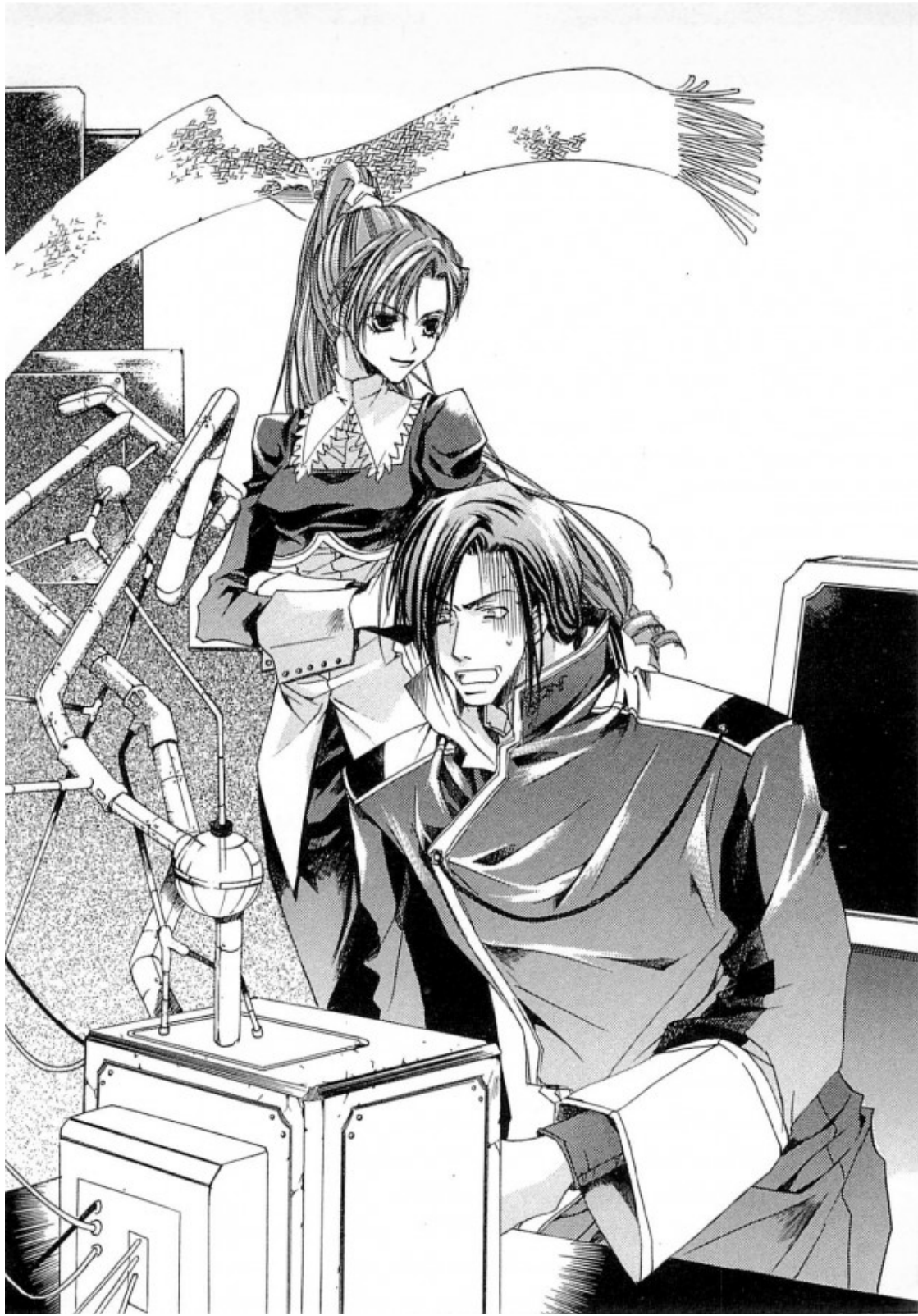
Ever since that time, the two of them were the Mad Magicalist and the Guinea Pig. The meat grinder machine was, without a doubt, a thing of excellence. Seeing the huge, magic-powered blades turn and chop up an entire pig whole was an unforgettable sight, even if you *wanted* to forget it. But one day, her older brother was searching for his pet chicken and looked inside... the rest of this story is too scary to continue.

"That would have made them cry in fear..."

Compared to *that* episode, Yuuri's horrifying magic he witnessed the other day seems cute.

"How rude. They were supposed to laugh."

The woman, given the thankless codename 'Red Devil,' manipulates the controller in her hand in a grandiose fashion. The Guinea Pig, with his hands suddenly thrust into the machine on the desk, opened his eyes wide in a move unlike him as he sat lightly in a chair. His mouth is shaped as if in mid-scream, but he has just barely managed to hold his voice down. Fluorescent purple fireworks are jumping from his fingers, spread as wide as they can be spread. They are sparks of magic (forcibly) gushing out.



“A-Anissina. I want to take my fingers out of this already.”

“Not until the weaving is finished.”

On the other side of Lord von Voltaire’s hands, a small loom has been installed. The yellow warp that has been strung up is being woven through with yellow string. It’s currently in knitting mode, but with just a change of a head, it can quickly be turned to fabric mode. It’s a complicated pattern, but it’s somehow being made with the mysterious inner-workings of the machine.

“Cut-cut the power! Just stop Mr. Fast-Knitter for a moment!”

“How lazy. This is why people say that demon men have become weak lately.”

She’s the one who’s been saying that. Lord von Voltaire’s childhood friend and knitting teacher, the woman who has written in her diary ten thousand times that she will devote her life to the advancement of The Great Demon Kingdom, the Mad Magicalist, has put her hobby to a practical use in researching magic to make the lives of demons all the more affluent via daily experiments like these.

At first glance, she seems to be a petite, slender and perhaps a slightly strong-willed beauty, but as one of The Great Demon Kingdom’s Three Great Witches, her power is on par with Lady Celi.

“Shit... maybe The Great Demon Kingdom’s Three Great *Nightmares*...”

“Did you say something?”

Taking out the finished product from Mr. Fast-Knitter, she examines the fabric closely. The knit and consistency is perfect, but it seems to be lacking in refinement.

“Hm, as expected, if there’s no feeling of having passed through a person’s hands, it just doesn’t have that transient feel. It follows that this...”

“... You’re going to say it’s a failure, right?”

“Oh, you guessed it.”

Of course. It’s been close to 150 years that they’ve been going through this same thing. Gwendal collapsed on the desk with a mutter. Why does she keep making these unnecessary machines? But still, that meat grinder was awesome. It was a masterpiece in every meaning of the word.

“What are you complaining about, Gwendal!? It’s because you just knit white pigs and bears and stuff without even trying to make something epic that you can only just barely make something like this. Passion and a fighting spirit is the deciding factor in knitting. You need more discipline!”

What he wishes above all is to never be seen like this. In actuality, he’s only convincing himself that no one knows.

Everyone knows.

* * * * *

Package tours are where the company takes care of everything and are thus super easy. From transportation tickets to accommodation reservations, the company arranges everything. Sometimes, even the souvenirs are included. On two-hour specials on TV, there's always talk about someone getting murdered on one of these vacations, but in reality they're not that dangerous. If there was one drawback, it was that you might get stuck riding with annoying tourists that you can't get away from for the whole day.

Kind of like now.

Putting our elbows on the railing, we faced the coast that had long disappeared over the horizon.

The four of us.

"... Why are their four of us?"

Our original reservation was for two men.

Because he would have definitely objected, I left a note for my overprotective tutor in the writing I had just learned saying that 'I'm going out for a little rehab.' But that was no good. First of all, he wouldn't understand what rehab was. (1)

So, I thought I'd write 'I'm leaving the castle,' but I couldn't remember how to spell 'castle.' In the end, I figured I'd at least let him know I was coming back. With that, the note became as so:

'I'm going out for half a month.' (2)

... Was that too vague? No, he'd be able to figure it out. Now I just hope that I got the sentence structure right...

Our destination is a temporarily neutral land so there's no problem if we're recognized as demons. But even so, black hair and eyes stand out too much so I've got on a brief disguise: round sunglasses that you would only find on a villain in a video game and a pink knit hat that's very fitting for this cold weather. Combined with this cane (Windpipe No. 1), I look like a suspicious old man.

Finished with my preparations, I rolled my huge trunk to the designated meeting spot. Waiting there in light clothing was the second son, seasoned traveler. But...

"You're late, Yuuri!"

"... huh?"

Also standing there was the third son of the three brothers that look nothing alike. If he kept his mouth shut, he was an unrivalled pretty boy, but in reality he was just a spoiled brat made all the more intimidating by the beauty he inherited from his mother.

"I'm your fiancé so it's my duty to supervise you on your travels so you don't get caught up in some sort of love affair! Especially since you're a flirt, a cheater and wimp!"

Wolfram von Bielefeld, flirts and cheaters become flirts and cheaters because of their true feelings... is what I didn't feel like explaining to him so I just said:

"... Don't call me a wimp."

"I apologize for letting him have his way like this," said Conrad as he faced the ocean breeze, not looking apologetic in the slightest. I'm getting throttled here- hey you're not enjoying this, are you!? I want to know.

“At any rate, I was more shocked by Your Majesty’s plan. Scandalously hiding a girl in your trunk. It was impressive.”

“I thought I’d pulled it off perfectly...”

The fourth person was inside my huge trunk and was wheeled here by me. They were that small.

When he looked inside, Conrad didn’t get angry, but instead looked like he was about to laugh.

“Well, if it isn’t the assassin!”

While he usually manages to predict my actions and is able to just shrug and say ‘I thought it’d turn out this way,’ it seems that this time I really blindsided him. As he pulled the assassin out of my luggage, his shoulders were shaking slightly.

“Unbelievable! What did you say to the guards?”

“That I wanted to have a private talk as father and child.”

“That’s like acknowledging the claim.”

I keep on telling you it’s not true.

Even I know it’s crazy to take the person who tried to kill you with you to rehab. But, she’s only about ten years old and if I left her at the castle I don’t know what Günter would do to her in his rage. He’s beautiful and wise, but when it comes to me, he loses his head. I can only think he suddenly gets stricken with some horrible illness or gets possessed by an animal spirit.

“How stupid are you?” Wolfram asked. “On what planet is there someone who takes the person who tried to kill them on a vacation?”

“There’s one person on this planet. Sorry for being stupid. But no one’s been able to get her to say why she tried to kill me or where she got the insignia from, you know? Would you be able to stand not knowing why an elementary school student tried to kill you? I wouldn’t. I want to ask her. But I still can’t get her to tell me her name.”

If I look to the side and down, there’s some curly red hair. The too-small waves look a little like the perm my mother had a few years ago. The look was super popular for a time, but as a baseball brat that was always starving, every time I saw it I thought of wavy noodles and had to eat some instant ramen.

“Hey, what’s your name? If you can’t tell me your last name, just your first name is fine.”

As the cold ocean breeze painted her cheeks red, she grasped the railing with her small hands. She’s glaring at something in the air as her manly eyebrows and long eyelashes tremble. Even though I haven’t met her eyes or heard her talk, I got the feeling that she’s keeping people at a distance and is pretty much rejecting everything in the world so I hesitated to call out to her.

Even so, I make myself keep asking.

Who are you? My what? Why did you want to kill me?

“Hey, if you don’t tell me your name I’m just gonna make something up. Like Instant Noodles or Maruchan. Oh, but I don’t mean Martinez who used to be in Seibu.” (3)

“It seems now’s not the time for that.”

Conrad puts his hand on the girl’s forehead while standing behind her. For a moment, I’m jealous of how easily and naturally he touched her like that.

“She has a fever. Probably because she’s been out in the wind too long.”

“A fever!? Then she won’t be able to go in the hot springs!?”

The ship's destination, Schildkraut, is separated from The Great Demon Kingdom by ocean and is the port city of Hildyard. From the impression I got from it when we passed through on the search for the demon sword, it was a free and neutral-seeming trade city. There are a lot of business-like people who bear no hostility towards us demons.

It seems they've overcome discrimination and prejudice with their hardcore merchant spirits.

A bit inland from Schildkraut is Hildyard's world famous resort town. Gathering all the pleasures known to man, it's a town that has stretched luxury to the limits. It's a theme park of the adult pleasures of gambling, drugs and sex. There aren't any dancing, human sized mice though. The image I've drawn in my mind is a neon-lit Las Vegas. Yes, a Las Vegas town where people from all over the world gather and have dangerous fun, enjoy drunken entertainment and the night never ends...

"We're not going there," said Conrad.

... and its adjacent hotspring town whose waters are reputed to cure most any illness.

If you bathe in this abundantly flowing water for one day you'll live three years longer, two days and you'll live six years longer, three days and you'll live until you die. That calculation is a bit strange.

"The waters really do work. I'm told my father recovered from serious, life-threatening injury after drinking the hotspring's water. I myself have had the pain in my sword arm's tendons completely healed after a two-week stay here. For strengthening an ankle after a sprain, ten days would be enough to make it even stronger than before."

"Ooh, I like that, stronger than before. Then if I soak up to my shoulders maybe I'll get rocket arms. And if I dive under, maybe my IQ will rise, too?"

As usual, Conrad just calmly tells me I'm fine the way I am. And this from a guy who makes appallingly dreadful jokes.

"Anyway, since Schildkraut is two days away, let's just pass the time in our cabin. Especially since we have a child with a fever and an adult who is seasick like always."

Speaking of which... I turned around and there was Wolfram, vomiting with tears in his eyes...

(1) Rehab is written in 'Japanglish' here as 'rihabiri/rehabili'. Oh, I also forgot to mention that Conrad used straight up English to say rehab in the last chapter ^-^;; The two of them use a lot of English. Yuuri *especially*. I should probably point that out more often...

(2) The real note says "I'm leaving home." He chose home because he couldn't spell castle and then figured, hey, it's the place where I live so I could call it my home. And then Yuuri's like, 'does that make me a runaway?' I changed it because of a(n embarrassingly lame/forced) joke later on. But! I promised myself I'd translate *everything*, so that means I'll have to embarrass myself with my lameness XD

(3) Two things in this footnote! The first is Maruchan (which I'm not even sure I *need* to footnote, but you never know). Maruchan is a company that makes instant ramen. The second is Martinez! Domingo Martinez played for the Seibu Lions and his nickname was Maruchan. It's got nothing to do with the ramen company, though. Martinez was a bit on the roly-poly side, and Martinez written in Japanese is 'Marutinesu,' so they took the 'Maru,' which means 'round,' and stuck -chan on the end for a cutesy nickname. Basically, Maruchan is a friendly(?) way of calling him... well, roly-poly. Here's his [trading card](#) XD

* * * * *

When you receive a letter from an important person to you, just breaking the seal can cause your heart to pound. And then, if it's the very first composition from a person who hasn't been able to write until now, you wouldn't be able to read it without tears in your eyes.

When Günter von Christ discovered the thin yellow paper left behind on top of the desk in the Demon King's deserted office, he did a little dance.

"That His Majesty would leave a letter for me in the Demon Language he has just learned!"

So moved that he even had 'tears' coming out of his nostrils, the tutor studied the slip of paper.

One brief sentence was written there with large, thick, and awkward letters.

"Oh, what strokes brimming with boldness and self-confidence! As expected of the calligraphy of the one who supports us demons. It makes me proud to teach him."

If you look at it from the side, the size and flow aren't balanced and there's no sense of any sort of layout. It's a note of an absolute beginner level. Even if you compare each character to the Nazca geoglyphs, you can just barely recognize them as letters. However, love seems to have an awesome power that turns a wise man into a fool.

"Now then, even though I'm alone, I'll read this heartfelt composition aloud."

'I go *out half monfh.*'

Yuuri was extremely hesitant about whether spoken language and written language was different, so he just wrote it in the subject-verb-object order he learned in middle school English class. If you took some artistic liberty in translating it, it meant 'I'm going out for a bit,' though.

"I.... go.... monf....?"

His slender white fingers were shaking so much that the paper was wrinkling.

"... Monf? I... go monf.... monk? go monk? ... Monk!?"

Academically translated, this reads as: 'I'm becoming a monk. Don't look for me.' (1) **you should definitely read the footnote XD

Normally in Japan, saying you'll become a monk just means something along the lines of joining Buddhism, but for demons it means to send your life along with a prayer to be under the care of the True King's spirit. It's the same as saying you're getting ordained.

"Why is His Majesty becoming a monk!? Was he not satisfied with me!?"

No one would become a monk for a reason like that. But for Günter, whose thinking ability had flown away, telling him that would be like reading The Great Demon Kingdom's Constitution to a horse. (2)

A soldier rushed out onto the opal floor of the office, not even pausing to knock on the door after running down the hallway.

"I have an announcement!"

"Is it about becoming a monk!?"

After being faced with such a ghastly visage, regardless of whether he was of an age where he could still be considered young, the messenger took a few steps back.

"Huh? N-no. I have no such joyful news. We believe that the perpetrator of the high treason

crime of attempting the assassination of the king has escaped. And, well... according to what I've heard, it seems likely that His Majesty himself let the criminal out in order to have a private talk with his child..."

"Now I understand everything!"

There's no telling what goes on in the brains of the ten nobles. The middle-aged soldier who brought the news slowly backed away from Günter, who was breathing wildly through his nostrils. How does he understand everything with just that little bit of information? The one he served before was like that, too. They were definitely born into the ten nobles, but all they did was invent bizarre things. From his view, it was mind-boggling why they spent so much time making those complicated machines.

After all, even if you make a magic-powered meat grinder machine, there are virtually no dishes in Great Demon Kingdom cuisine that use ground meat.

This is why normal citizens can't understand the thought processes of nobles.

"His Majesty is so kind. Even though he knows it's not his child, he was likely unable to not attempt to save them from the path of evil!"

"Y-yeah..."

"In order to heal a young girl's twisted heart, borrowing the power of faith is certainly effective. I expect nothing less from the man I admire. His every thought is full of wisdom. But Your Majesty, that doesn't mean that you have to become a priest as well! Sometimes love that runs too deep becomes self-sacrifice! While it's one of his charming qualities, it's such a waste that he's squandering all that beauty and intelligence on one child!"

Wondering if he's reciting some script, the only spectator becomes uneasy.

Drawing his graceful eyebrows together, the tutor gazed at the heavens and made a fist.

"I have to do something...."

"What do you mean when you say 'do something?'"

"I have to bring His Majesty back! First, I need to find what temple he went to. Of course, since His Majesty is so hard on himself, he would have chosen the most difficult road. And then, if necessary, I will also join the brotherhood to save him... you there!"

Being pointed at by a beauty, the soldier reflexively stands up straight.

"Wh-what is it!?"

"Do you want to become a monk with me?"

It seems like he'll be lonely doing it by himself.

(1) OMG, this was painful! I'm really bad at this pun stuff! I'm so sorry! x.x It was a highly untranslatable joke where kanji characters accidentally form the word for 'becoming a Buddhist monk.'

This is the real joke. Yuuri wrote, "I **leave home**." (Ore, *deru*, ie **wo**). The characters that Günter couldn't read were written in katakana(bold-italic approximations, here). So it was like he was going, "I... lea... ho...?" Basically, all he could read was 'I' and the kanji. Anyway, the kanji for 'leave' and 'home' form the word 'shukke' which, as I mentioned before, means becoming a monk, so that's how Günter comes to his conclusion. Geez, that was difficult just to explain o.o

So anyway, yeah. I made it a spelling mistake + un-readability. I'ma go hide under a rock now XD

(2) This was a joke too. It continues on the whole Buddhist theme here. There's a saying in Japanese that goes 'a Buddhist prayer on horse's ears' (uma no mimi ni nenbutsu). It means something along the lines of doing something pointless. It's kind of (but only *kind of*) similar to 'pearls before swine.' Takabayashi replaced the 'buddhist prayer' with 'The Great Demon Kingdom's Constitution.' Anyway, I thought it made sense literally translated so I left it as is ^-^

* * * * *

I woke to the sound of moaning.

I freaked out a bit wondering what I would do if it turned out to be a soaking wet girl sobbing in the corner of the room or a horde of fallen soldiers looking at me, but the moaner was the Assassin Girl because her fever had risen.

Conrad had gone to the ship's sickbay for some children's medicine, and I was left alone with the suffering girl in the small cabin. Because we had asked for a trip where we wouldn't have to worry about standing out, the cabin was plain as opposed to last time's luxurious passenger ship's stateroom. Because we had turned a double into a room for four, it was kind of like a boarding house. Wolfram was sleeping soundly in the next bed. What's up with the angelic pretty boy snoring with a sound like 'Gghgpihh-ghgpihh.'

The sweat that appeared on the child's forehead shone in the dim light of the small lamp. The rolling of the deep black waves spread out on the other side of the round, inset window. I felt minute vibrations from them like a stronger version of a cell phone's vibrate function. If giant squids had a territory fight near the ocean floor, it seems the boat will feel the effects as well.

The girl who still hasn't told me her name flipped over in her sleep and turned her back to me. Her tanned arm was uncovered. With the intent of fixing her blanket, I grab a hold of Windpipe No. 1 and stand.

When I caught the flu, for three days I could just barely make it to the bathroom. It was painful to eat and drink. I could only eat my mother's porridge or ice cream.

"... Ice cream would be great, right? More than that ... it'd be great if her mother was here."

Since husband and wife equally take part in raising their children, I guess a father would be okay too.

"Hey, where are you from? What house in what country can I give you back to?"

"...-ome."

I thought it was some random babble.



“Hm?”

With her back still facing me, the girl repeats herself in a hoarse voice.

“I can’t go back home.”

“Why? Is it money related? If you need a train ticket or... ah, there are no trains, huh? But your parents are probably worried, so I could always just take you back home myself. Do you know your address? Oh yeah, what’s your name?”

To offer to pay transportation fees for the person who tried to kill you... I’m really something else. The girl clammed up again and, due to her fever, curled herself up into a fetal position as if she were cold.

Giving up, I move to grab the blanket and cover her exposed left arm. On her olive-colored, thin shoulder, there was small black writing. Ten is a really young age to have a tattoo.

“I..... Izu...ra. Is that a name? Or is that an encouraging word or something? Izura... sounds like a girl’s name. Then I’ll call you Izura.”

“No! Izura is my mother’s name!”

“Then what’s your name?”

“Greta,” she said bluntly. There wasn’t a ‘my name is’ or a ‘pleased to meetcha’ or ‘let’s get along’ or nothing. (1)

Ah well, for now let’s just do introductions.

“Greta, I’m Yuuri. Shibuya Yuuri Harajuku.....”

I started to say it out of habit and caught myself. Here there are no kanji and no Harajuku. This introduction will never be useful to me again. I’ll probably never have another chance to use it.

“No, never mind, just Yuuri is fine. And, can you tell me your address? Where do you live? A cold place? A city? If you’re cold, I’ll get another blanket...”

Without any clear intent, I touched her hair. I might have been going to pat her head. I didn’t think anything of it.

Greta screamed. It was so loud you wouldn’t even think she was sick.

“Ah, sorry!”

“Don’t touch me, don’t touch me! Help! Someone help!”

Twisting her body in order to get away from me, she fell unceremoniously from the bed.

“Wait, wait! I won’t do anything. I’m not going to do anything, okay?”

“Yuuri, wha!? Whadd’re ya doin’ to the kid!?”

With eyes half-opened, Wolfram wakes up. He had trouble articulating.

“You unfaithful, shameless jerk! You’ll even lay your hands on a little girl!? And right in front of me, your fiancé. Don’t tell me the reason you’ve been rejecting me is because you have that kind of preference!?”

“Un-unfaithful!? Wait, I haven’t laid my hands on anyone! And ignoring your gender, what’s this about ‘preference!?’ What kind of preference!?”

You’re suspecting Yuuri Shibuya has a Lolita Complex? That’s not even funny. I have no such interests. If I had to say one or the other, I like older girls.

“If I liked little girls, then I wouldn’t have the hots for your moth- ah, hold on!”

There’s someone knocking on the door. I locked it just in case. Cracking it open a bit, I see a uniformed crewman standing at attention.

"What is it?"

"I was on patrol of the passenger cabins and heard the screams of a small child from your cabin."

Damn. The three cabins on both sides probably heard it, too. Let's restore the calm.

"Oh, it's nothing really. We were just having a little argument. Nothing to trouble the staff about."

"With your powerful wealth, are you scheming to hand-raise the perfect woman from a young age to be your wife?"

"S-Scheming?"

Hey, isn't that from *The Tale of Genji*? To my utter bewilderment, this young crewman with a sense of justice continued to bare his anger at me.

"And now that she won't listen to you, you're trying to control her with violence? Hitting her with a cane."

"Huh!? Ah, this is Windpipe No. 1! I didn't hit her with it... Um, am I being mistaken for a child abuser or a violent husband or something?"

"Hey, human over there, cut it out. Yuuri's fiancé is me. For a filthy kid li... urk."

"Ah, Wolf, don't throw up in bed! Don't ride if you puke, don't puke if you ride!"

"Oh, so you're not betrothed to the child, but that person over there? And your fiancé has morning sickness so what is your relation to that child?"

"She's my illegitimate child! Are you satisfied? Thank you, bye-bye, you're doing a great job!"

I slam the door right in his confused face. People who get in the way of other people's love affairs... wait no, it's not a love affair. Keep your nose out of other people's business.

Crouched down in the gap between the bed and the wall, the girl is muttering something over and over. Pressing her forehead to the floor, she's covering her ears with her clenched fists.

"I can't believe... I can't believe anyone... not anyone."

"That means me, huh?"

Of course. She came to kill me with a small blade. She probably, no, *definitely* hates me. If not, a ten year old wouldn't try to take someone's life.

"What do you think I'll do to you?"

I was apparently making a very pitiful face while looking at the shivering child. Having seemed to have held down his nausea, Wolfram moves to stand behind me with assured footsteps.

"I told you, didn't I?"

"What?"

"That even if you took a trip to get along with someone who came after you..."

Even though those curls I thought looked like ramen were only a few centimeters away, my fingers stop in midair.

"... you'll only hurt yourself."

"You didn't tell me that so kindly."

"I *did* tell you – that you were an idiot. Whatever. Don't be so half-assed with your attitude. Isn't that just going to hold you back?"

Stretching my back slowly, I divide my weight between my three legs.

“But I hated it. I hated not knowing why someone didn’t like me.”

“Well at the very least, you figured out her name.”

That’s right. I don’t have to call her assassin or hitman anymore. She’s told me her and her mother’s names.

“Greta, if you don’t go back to your bed and warm up, your fever will stop going down again. Come on, stand up and get under the covers. If you end up developing a cold, you won’t be able to go into the hot springs, right?”

Deciding that I won’t be the one who initiates contact anymore, I simply hold out my right hand and wait. If she stands up on her own, that’s fine and if she grabs my hand for support, that’s fine too. Without meeting my gaze, Greta grabs my hand with an infuriating slowness. With the sudden weight of another person, my right ankle starts hurting, but I kept holding her hand until she got into bed. I tell her that ‘it’s fine, colds heal up right away.’ It was only for a moment, but I’m assaulted by the sluggish feeling from fevers I got when I was child. Lukewarm waves run from my arms to my shoulders and break up and disperse at my medulla. The irritating pain I couldn’t do anything about suddenly leaves my body.

“...uh....”

Before I had any time to think about what just happened, there’s another knock at the door. It’s Conrad with anti-fever medication and ice.

(1) Just wanted to point out that Yuuri says ‘My name is’ in English here.

Chapter 3

Gwendal von Voltaire hates letting his work pile up. It's hard to imagine from his stubborn and unapproachable appearance, but he gets irritated when he's given work all at once or if there are a number of unresolved problems. Get today's work done today and then do a little bit of what needs to be done tomorrow. That's his motto.

Today, like always, he enters the office in Voltaire castle at the designated time and grabs his writing materials while being warmed by the fireplace at his back.

His third cup of black tea is growing cold.

"Are you listening, Gwendal?"

'Who would listen!?' he yells bitterly in his heart, but all he did was just push the point of his pen into the paper. A blue-black stain spreads there.

Camped out at the most comfortable spot by the fire, one of The Great Demon Kingdom's Three Great Nightmares keeps on talking. Her topic is training techniques for the advancement of magic power.

"At this rate, the men's magical power is only going to keep falling. Only around one quarter of this year's new male adults are at the standard level. This is a serious situation. In order to combat this present condition, we need to obligate that the boys undergo special training before they become adults. Here's where my thought comes in."

Her hair is made even redder by the light of the fire, and the orange light flashes sometimes in her light blue eyes. Anissina von Karbelnikoff's passion and knowledge has always been devoted to the demons.

Her course of action isn't necessarily correct, though.

"How about for a year before they become adults, all boys who can use magic, regardless of their level of ability, be put at a training facility where they'll eat and sleep together and follow a schedule of training designed to strengthen their magic? They'll learn theory and practice from early morning to late night, and they'll be faced with guaranteed inescapable traps like during wartime and any deserters will be met with a shameful mark of defeat. I'll call it, 'W**! Men's only training camp! There will be tears!'"

What's up with the familiar name for this plan? (1)

"... Isn't it fine to just assign people where they'd be most efficient?"

While signing a permit for building a welfare facility within his territory, his face became even more bitter.

"If women are more proficient at magic, then just put women in those professional positions. The men will be distributed to the cavalry and infantry. With that, the problem will resolve itself."

"This is why I'm always saying that you think too nearsightedly!"

Anissina dramatically gazed up at the ceiling, shrugged her shoulders, and made a gesture like she was a fake TV host.

"Haven't I been telling you this since we were children? Men should be strong and women should be kind."

"Well said for the worst example of that statement."

“Did you just say ‘worst example?’”

Hearing the threat in that low mutter, the formidable looking lord of the land averted his eyes. He is a cynic with unparalleled ability to keep a cool head, the owner of an unrivalled heavy bass voice and a stature more fitting than anyone to be the Demon King, and he was also the previous Crown Prince, but this all means nothing when he stands before his childhood friend.

“Anyway, your dream was for women to be strong in the world. If so, wouldn’t just leaving the weakness of the boys alone bring you closer to your ideal kingdom?”

“A prejudiced attitude as always! Do you think that I’ll enjoy supporting weak men? By following strong men, we can create a world with truly strong women! As it stands, we demons are too lacking in order for that to happen. We need the men to raise the bar higher and higher. That’s why I’ve invented this training machine.”

As he thought, it’s another invention. There’s no way he can escape her experiment now, no matter how hard he struggles. Behind him, Anissina pulls out a long object that looks like a sword and grasps the handle in the center. A moment later, the wing-shaped boards on either side started bending wildly with the vibration.

He’s seen this before somewhere. And it was quite popular a very long time ago.

“If you keep doing this for a whole day, you’ll have six times normal results! I call it The Magical Blade.”

The wings are making a buzzing noise. Unable to refrain from comment, Gwendal takes a deep breath.

“Isn’t that the machine that trains your abdominal muscles...”

“No, it’s The Magical Blade! Now Gwendal, swing this around for a day. To become much, much stronger!”

I’m begging you, please go home!

The voice in his heart didn’t reach her.

(1) This is a reference to a show called ‘Wow! Women’s only swimming competition!’ (Doki! Onnadarake no suiei taikai) I made it ‘wow’ because there isn’t really a translation for ‘doki’ as it is used here. It’s more of a sound effect. Anyway, the show ended in 1992. It was about a bunch of idols and other famous girls in swimming competitions. There were *definitely* tears from the losers XD Nowadays, it’s become a kind of funny thing to say ‘Wow! Men/Women only [insert something here]!’ Oh, and Takabayashi-sensei censored the name in the book so that’s why there are *’s.

* * * * *

'Neon-lit Las Vegas, the city without night, ah, Las Vegas of youth, the brief life of Las Vegas.' I sang a little song of praise to Vegas as the scenery unfolded before my eyes.

"... but, is this Atami?"(1)

"It's not 'Atahmee,' it's Hildyard's resort town, the world famous pleasure town."

"Isn't it supposed to be a place where all the pleasures known to man are gathered and where luxury is stretched to the limits?"

"I believe they are all gathered."

"But, this isn't anything like Las Vegas! There aren't any roller coasters or pyramid shaped hotels or fountains or stages or musicals."

"Vegas isn't a city like this?"

Even if he went to America, it seems he didn't travel the entire country. This is definitely not the West Coast. Well, I haven't been there either.

Rather than strong old men with slumped shoulders going home from being exploited at the casinos, it seems more suited for guys wearing large kimonos and wooden sandals happily shooting porno writers at a gun range. Of course, the people who are really walking around here are all blondes and brunettes and their clothes and shoes are all of an other-worldly design and there is nothing Japanese here. But it's still like Atami. I wonder why?

There are a lot of lively tourists and the touts are shouting enthusiastically from the never-ending shops on both sides of the road. The buildings are at most three stories high and there isn't anything taller around. Here and there are trees that look a bit like small palms that have thin green leaves despite it being winter. Cats are stretched out randomly on the stone-paved roads. This may be because of the hot springs, but it's warm for the season.

"Anyway, it's great that we got here safely. I don't know how much more of being in that boat I could have took."

The latter part of the sea voyage was awful. If I got hungry and went out to the mess hall, I'd hear gossip along these lines: 'That's the guy with the fiancé with morning sickness and the hidden child,' 'He's a lot younger than I thought,' 'Having an illegitimate child at that age?' 'Oh, but I wonder who that sort of good-looking man with them is,' 'Isn't he the father of that illegitimate child?' 'Eh!? Then is that guy a girl even though they look like a guy?!' And then if I had room service bring me meals in my room, Wolfram sent it all back (half digested). It was such a horrible two days if it got turned into a one hour special on TV, it'd be called 'A Crappy Journey, Feeling like You're in Hell.'

Greta's fever subsided, but now I feel like staying in bed from anxiety.

"Anyway, I want to check in at the hotel and get in the hot springs as soon as possible."

At the entrance to town, Conrad pays a bellboy and hands over my trunk. When I look up, there is a red, Torii-shaped gate in front of me with a round mirror at the top. (2) Immediately, the second son explains.

"That is the symbol of the resort town, the Demon Mirror."

"The Demon Mirror? Does that mean we've discovered another treasure of the demons!? Should we rip that down and take it home?"

“No, that doesn’t belong to us... look here.”

Diagonal rays of orange light from the setting sun stretched towards the mirror. I thought they’d get reflected, but the light shined right through it. In the center of a circular area of the stone paving, several designs appeared with that orange light. All of the tourists passing by gave a shout of joy.

It was magical and beautiful.

“That is the true form of the Demon Mirror here. At first glance it seems to be a completely normal mirror, but if light hits it from a certain angle it passes through without being reflected and projects several patterns. I think it’s supposed to have something to do with this country’s god. In the morning, there’s another pattern on the other side-”

“It all depends on the skill of the artisan. The quality differs from the demon mirrors belonging to demons who have supernatural abilities.”

Stealing his older brother’s words, the third son lifted his nose in the air. I suppose that means there are other demon mirrors.

“Our Great Demon Kingdom’s most valuable treasure, the Demon Mirror of the Water’s Surface, has the beautiful and terrible power to show the true face of anyone who looks into it. Although, it seems to not be in the kingdom at the moment.”

“We haven’t come here to go looking for that treasure, but to get some treatment from the hot springs, right? Just to be clear, I’m not searching for any treasure. I’m here to take it easy soaking in the water and healing my foot.”

And anyway, that whole ‘true face’ thing sounds like a bunch of crap. What’s reflected in a mirror is your own face just the way it is. There’s no ‘truth’ or ‘lies’ to that.

“That’s right. We came here for the rehab of His Majesty’s foot so we shouldn’t worry him needlessly.”

Dodging the people going in the opposite direction, we head south down the Atami street. The smells of all the food from the various stores are mixing together to create a complicated stench. Is it like a new variety of stateless cuisine?

“... Actually it’s more like over-boiled eggs...”

“Ah, that’s sulfur. From the hot springs.”

Oh so that’s what it is. I’d been thinking it was a really unappetizing smell.

Coming out of the shopping zone and into the amusement zone, there’s target practice (but with bows and arrows) and ring tossing, and inside the buildings there is drinking and gambling. In the plaza, there are some wooden buildings and whitish tents. It makes me remember the circus I was taken to when I was in preschool and couldn’t even tell left from right. Maybe I was just scared of the make-up, but I dreamt of clowns chasing me.

A bizarre old man with a protruding belly is yelling while collecting tickets.

“Hey boys and girls! Want to go see the freak show? You won’t be turned into vampires or anything. You’ll just have a fun thrill before you go home.”

There’s a picture of a monster on a showy billboard with red writing. It’s a short phrase that even I might be able to read.

“... The World’s Dongs!?”

“Not ‘dongs,’ dangerous. It says ‘The World’s Dangerous Animals,’” said Conrad. (3)

My reading ability is still lacking.

In order to check in, we move through this area and head for the hot spring zone. It's at least a thirty minute journey after we get out of the carriage. That's a world famous pleasure town for you.

Perhaps she was because she was afraid of the monsters at the freak show, but suddenly Greta is holding on to my sleeve. It seems like she doesn't realize she's doing it so I don't make a fuss about it.

"Hey there, are you free?"

Taken by surprise, my eyebrows raise comically. Turning around to face who had called out, I see a girl with a huge smile craning her neck towards me. The length of her skirt is very short and her suntanned legs are completely exposed. Even though she's not old enough to have cleavage, she's wearing a slip dress that's purposefully accentuating her chest. I guess wearing clothes so suggestive that they're giving you goose bumps from the cold must be part of a fashionable girl's spirit.

But no matter how exposing her clothes are, if I look closely she's still a middle-school student.

Oh my god! I've been hit on by a middle-school girl!

Since I get bad endings even on Tokimemo, this is the first time in my life I've been approached by a girl. Is this what they call a reverse-pickup!? (4)

"You're with friends. Hey, if you'd like, you can all come together."

Another lanky girl comes forward with a sluggish gait. Instantly, my happy feelings plummet to earth.

"... Oh, you're after Conrad."

"I'm sorry, but we're on our way to our hotel. We don't have time to have fun."

Conrart Weller, popular with men and women of all ages, pushes me along with a smile that's hard to say is heartfelt.

"That girl seems to not be feeling well. It's bad for your health to be wearing clothes like that in this cold weather."

"Then take us to your room! If you do, then we can stay with you for the night!"

The middle-school girl is relentless. She must really have taken a liking to Conrad if she's asking to not have to go home for the night. With his handsomeness and personality, I can understand why she wouldn't want him to get away. But if you hear one of his jokes... you'll freeze to death.

Seeing the young girl pressing my companion's elbow into her breasts, my old-fashioned sense of morality reared its head. It wasn't jealousy, nope, definitely not jealousy.

"Hey you guys. I was happy for a moment that I got hit on, but in my opinion, you have to be at least 15 to spend the night out somewhere, alright!? Go home and ask your parents. You're probably worrying them sick..."

At the mention of 'parents,' the weight on my jacket sleeve suddenly disappears.

Greta had let go.

"... We weren't talking to you."

"Hey you, stop messing around! Calling out to people with children is a horrible thing for us streetwalkers to do!" yelled a coquettish girl from the opposite side of the street. She had a cigarette in her mouth and disheveled hair and even though she was a bit messy, she was very

sexy. I could see some real cleavage through her crossed arms.

“Those people have come to have fun as a family. This is Hildyard’s pleasure town, you know? There’s lots more to do here than women.”

The underage girls run into the store to hide. With a laugh, the girl puts a hand on Conrad’s shoulder. This may seem repetitive, but his jokes are... oh I give up.

“When I came here five years ago, it didn’t seem so indecent.”

“Three months ago, a bunch of young ones came flooding in. It seems like the leading authority changed and that sort of plan was put in place. There are boring customers coming in who are interested in those inexperienced kids. The younger the better, or something like that. Seriously, it’s making it hard to do business nowadays. By the way...”

Her gaze does a mode change.

“You’re quite the looker. How about it? We can have some fun after your companions go to bed.”

“I’m sorry, but I have someone I can’t betray.”

And once again, Lord Weller whips out another technique with a smile that an around-hundred-year-old would never be able to pull off.

As I get goose bumps, I make a memo on my palm with my finger. I see, you can easily take care of any offer that’s hard to turn down with those words. ‘Please buy me an English conversation book.’ ‘I’m sorry, but I have someone I can’t betray.’ Wow, I’m so tired of his bragging I could spit.

Greta, who had been completely silent so far, suddenly makes a short noise. She starts to move as if to run away, but she stops when she sees who’s coming.

“What are you doing!? You let me go ahead by myself! I called out in a loud voice because I wasn’t getting any response from you and when I turned around no one was behind me! You made me embarrass myself!”

At that moment, I finally realized that Wolfram hadn’t been around.

(1) Atami is a resort town in Shizuoka famous for its hot springs. It’s a bit lit up along the beach, but it’s definitely nowhere near Las Vegas levels. Also, while you’re down here reading the footnote, to be honest I can’t figure out if the song Yuuri was singing is a real song or if he just made it up.

(2) Torii gates are those Japanese archways most commonly found in front of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. If you’ve watched anime, you’ve most likely seen one before. They are used to mark the entrance to somewhere sacred. You can google image search them [here](#).

(3) For those interested, the original Japanese was ‘ Sekai no chin!’ (‘...The world’s penises!’... Am I allowed to type penises? Oh well, I did it twice already XD) And Conrad corrects him saying ‘Chin janakute, chinjuu. Sekai no chinjuu tenkomori, da sou desu.” (Not ‘penises,’ ‘rare animals.’ It says ‘A Collection of the World’s Rare Animals’). Basically, Yuuri stopped reading halfway and ‘Sekai no Chinjuu Tenkomori’ became ‘Sekai no Chin.’

(4) In case you didn’t know already, Tokimemo is short for Tokimeki Memorial which is a

dating game.

* * * * *

Baths, baths, baths, as far as the eye can see.

This is a hot spring paradise. The Super Bath-House and Health Land in my neighborhood just can't compare. Several dozen baths surrounded by rocks are lined up neatly and there are so many people coming in and out of all the entrances that you can't even slip between them. It's kind of like there was a hot spring trade fair at the Tokyo Dome. And they're all mixed baths.

"Wow, awesome!"

With just a towel wrapped around my waist, I start walking towards a nearby bath. I can't use Windpipe No. 1. It doesn't have the miracle cure that the hot spring treatment can provide. The people already in the bath are around ten women. They're blatantly pointing at me and whispering amongst themselves, but I can't let myself be embarrassed just by that. The sign said mixed bathing was a go so there's no need to hold back.

"Hold on, Your Majesty... I mean, Young Master."

"I know, I know, first I have to wash off first, right? I've got to be clean before I get in."

"No, that's not why I stopped you."

"What are you doing, Yuuri? That's a bath for beauty. What am I going to do if you get even more beautiful?"

Blathering on with his weird aesthetic sense, Wolfram quickly walks away. I guess baths for bruises and sprains are farther in. For someone who looks like a prince, the fact that he isn't even wrapping a towel around his waist isn't very manly.

As he walked past me, I caught sight of something like a tail flapping.

"... No way."

When I turn around, I see an adorable Greta standing there dressed in a school swimsuit holding a little ducky. Conrad, in a risqué speedo, is holding out swimming trunks for me and laughing.

"They're for swimming."

"... Are you kidding!? This is a thong bikini! And it's mustard yellow!?"

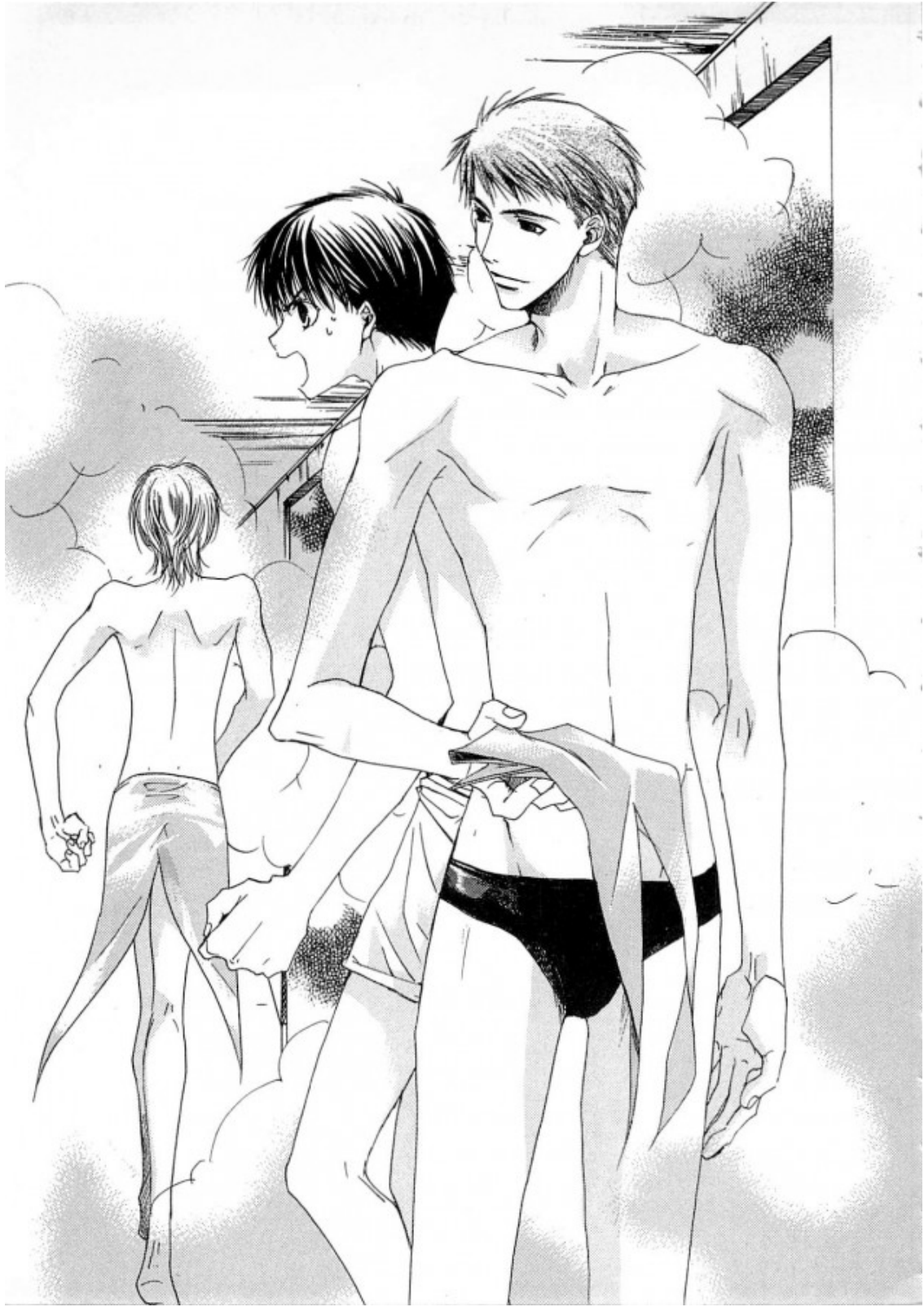
On top of that, there's tails on the butt part like a tailcoat!?

This is too embarrassing. It'd be better to just have my butt out on display! I tried to protest for a time, but for someone who loves baseball, I'm weak against things that are written in a rule book. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. If wearing this bikini thong (with tails) is going to heal my ankle, then I'll just have to think of this all as a lost bet.

So, I got in the baths in a swimsuit so embarrassing if someone took a picture of me I'd cry. The bruise and sprains bath is right next to the sword wounds bath and there are five scary old guys bathing there who say nothing to us, but when they stand up, they're all wearing the same thongs. It took all I had to not laugh.

The effects of the hot springs were immense. Even though I knew it was healing, somewhere in my heart I was still a bit apprehensive about putting weight on my right ankle, but

now I can walk firmly on it without the cane. If I keep this up for three days, then the bones will strengthen. Even if I have to embarrass myself in front of everyone, I'll come here just to get in the baths.



Two hours later, after having my fill of all the baths, I aimlessly walk around the Atami-like town. In the restaurant zone said to hold tastes from all the corners of the world, I try a Kirdar dish that Lord Weller recommended. I thought it was baked eel, but when they told me it was actually an insect I worried about what to do (I ate it, though).

Compared to our rough treatment on the ship, the hotel was first class and comfortable.

That was due to Conrad kindly changing our reservation to two twin rooms.

Because it would be a problem if the assassin and the target were paired together, Wolfram and I are in the same room. It's the same as usual.

There were sounds coming from the adjacent room for a while, but by the time my digital analog G-shock told me it was nine, it was completely quiet. The last thing I heard as I was on my 50th sit-up after throwing my sheets aside was a door shutting and footsteps leading away.

"... Conrad went out!"

The third son, who had turned off the lamp and was slowly drinking some local wine in the moonlight, showed no interest.

"Hey, Conrad went out. I wonder if he went to go see that woman from before."

"I doubt that."

"Why? Even if you are brothers, aren't you a little too confident?"

"He's not interested in that sort of woman."

When I first came here, he wouldn't even acknowledge that he was a demon, let alone his brother. I wonder what changed that he would actually know what sort of woman Conrad preferred.

"Then what kind of woman does he like?"

"He likes them more pure, or should I say plain, maybe even rude. I guess... girls like Suzanna Julia."

"What's up with that? He likes rude girls?"

I feel a bit conflicted after hearing a familiar name. From what I overheard that night, she was a very important person to Lord Weller. (1)

"But she wasn't his lover, right?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe it was adultery. Does it seem like adultery?"

"It didn't happen. I can assure you."

The Lion's blue magic stone at my chest reacts to the name and heats up. I've never asked Conrad about it, but I've vaguely realized that the person who owned this before was probably her. I'd heard this before, but the woman named Suzanna Julia von Wincott was engaged to another man.

"She was Adalbert's fiancé. Even the date for their wedding was set. But for some reason, one day mother said that the engagement between Julia and Adalbert would probably be broken off. The head of the Wincott territory is a man who values equality and he respected Conrad's skill with a sword, so rather than give his daughter away to the von Grantz family, he may have wanted her to succeed the Wincott house instead... if they could do something about the feelings of those involved."

"What do you mean, 'feelings?'"

"... Wincott has the oldest history among the ten noble families. It's said that the founder

even fought by the side of the True King against the Originators. On top of that, Julia was said to be the greatest practitioner of magic in the kingdom. Everyone acknowledged that. But Conrart was... well he definitely has my mother's blood but..."

"But his father was human?"

"Yeah."

I kind of figured that might have been a problem. Even in Japan, there are always people who raise complaints about the difference in family status. Discrimination and prejudice against people and race would have definitely been an issue, but it's also a fact that there are many parents who are hesitant about sending their daughter off on an international marriage. It's unreasonable, but overcoming that obstacle is probably love. However, as a baseball boy for whom love is far beyond my abilities, it's a bit embarrassing to think about.

"Yeah... no, it wasn't an issue about whether someone would object to their relationship... it was during wartime so the problem was more serious."

"Hey, you're not making yourself clear."

"Anyway, the prime minister at the time... you met him, right, the man named Stuffel?"

"Yeah, yeah, Lady Celi's older brother. I met him."

"That's right. He was a foolish coward who only wanted to cling to his authority."

Spitting out low and bitter words about his uncle, Wolfram looked surprisingly like the eldest son. The more time I spend with them, the more I can see the strength of the blood between these siblings.

"There was someone giving him bad counsel, so Conrart was forced to go to the frontlines. By the time he miraculously returned... Suzanna Julia had died."

In my generation that's called 'the peaceful idiots,' this is a tragic love that can only be found in books. But in my grandparent's time it probably wasn't so rare and even now in other places on Earth there are tragedies occurring. Even in this world in places of war, this is definitely happening.

Wolfram's voice becoming low and stiff implied that he was talking about something he didn't want to be. Even I don't have the intention of persistently asking questions about painful truths, but there is just one thing that I do want to know. Not about the past, but of the present.

"So, what do you think?"

"About what?"

"About Conrad because he's half human, what do you think?"

As his little brother, this question seems to trouble him. He lets out a low grunt and falls silent.

"I don't care about the past. I'm talking about since I've come here."

"... That's..."

Moving away from the table by the window, I playfully kick the third son as he sits on the bed. It was my way of telling him that I'd want a detailed answer sooner or later.

"How long are you going to sit there drinking alcohol like an old man? Well, I guess there's no helping that since you're 82."

My overseer wasn't around and my right ankle felt awesome and I felt 9 o'clock was too early to call it a day.

"Hey, let's go have some hot spring town nightlife fun. Like ring toss or target practice or

smart ball.” (2)

Wolfram immediately returned to his arrogant behavior and sniffed in derision.

“Nightlife fun? I’ve gotten bored of that childish nonsense.”

“H-hey! Don’t tell me you’re just going to go to sleep...”

Without even waiting for me to finish talking, he lays down for bed.

“... Well I guess it can’t be helped.... He *is* 82.”

(1) In case you forgot and/or it’s been a million years since you read it, he’s talking about Josak and Conrad’s conversation he eavesdropped on in book 2.

(2) I’ve heard smart ball described as similar to pinball, but I gotta admit, every time I see a smart ball machine I think of a giant, ping-pong ball spewing version of those cheap toys that you shake around and try and get all the balls in the little bucket/U-shaped things. Here’s a video of [a dude playing smart ball](#) because that’s the best explanation I can come up with XD

Chapter 4

Quite literally staying at his desk from morning to night, he was working on approving four days worth of documents. His Excellency, Gwendal von Voltaire, stands up unsteadily from his chair.

He was working so hard he didn't even stop for lunch so even though his head was swimming with numbers and roundabout documents, he was starving. With the intention of pouring some alcohol in a nice cup of hot tea, he reaches out to the tea kettle sitting in front of the fire.

He had to leave the castle the next morning. That's the reason he pushed himself so hard.

The nearly-assassinated Demon King had disappeared and the royal advisor Lord von Christ had worked himself into another panic. He'd made a huge fuss about becoming a monk or something and had left, leaving all of the pending paperwork at the castle unattended. Gwendal is called every time something like this happens as he is someone who finishes his work with scary resignation.

"... Honestly, what's the point of having a royal advisor?"

In the first place, on what planet is there a king who takes the person who tried to kill him to be rehabilitated by becoming a monk? From his point of view, the attempted assassination itself was just a farce. His two younger brothers were there. The king wouldn't have been killed by something so silly.

On the other hand, if you get involved with that kid, 9 times out of ten it ends up not being a decent situation. He unconsciously grabs his right wrist. There's still a scar there from where he was chained to Yuuri. It's completely healed, but when it gets cold like this, sometimes the bones creak.

"Maybe I should soak in a hot spring..."

"Are you inviting me to go to a hot spring?"

After being called out to by the Red Devil who appears out of nowhere, the eldest son almost jumped in surprise. Opening the door he had definitely locked, Anissina von Karbelnikoff comes striding forward.

"I, I wasn't inviting you."

"That's unfortunate. Whether you were inviting me or not, I decided a little while ago that I was going on a journey by myself."

"You're... going on a journey?"

Looking almost directly down on her tied up, fiery-red hair, Gwendal is struck speechless for a moment.

"That's right, by myself... I'm going for it. There's nothing more disgusting than tea that a man has made... And the magical power of the men in this country is too weak. There has to be somewhere in this world where someone with even greater magical powers than the demons is waiting to meet me!"

Bon voyage from the Great Demon Kingdom.

"But anyway, why don't you hire a secretary in this castle? Your work efficiency won't

improve otherwise. If you would like, I can let you borrow the Magic-Powered Secretary No. 1 I invented, Ms. Voluptuous.”

Please don't. That thing only makes sexy poses and doesn't bring you a single contract. And on top of that, there's nothing voluptuous about it. Nothing at all. And besides, the reason the secretary is faking an illness to get out of work is because Anissina has been hanging around the office.

She pours red tea into a white porcelain tea cup. Steam comes up in between the two.

“You said the men in this country have weak magical abilities, right?”

“Yes, I said so. Do you have an objection?”

“... Have you tested anyone besides your older brother, Günter or myself?”

“No.”

With a look on her face that says ‘why would you ask something like that?’, the Mad Magicalist hands her childhood friend the tea.

“You're the strongest and you're only at this level, so I have no interest in weaker men.”

He doesn't know if he's being complimented or insulted. But, he can't hate something small and cute even if it bites his hand.

* * * * *

Just in case, I wait until I can hear Wolfram's signature ‘Gghgpilh-ghgpilh’ before I get dressed and leave the room. I don't really think I need it, but to alleviate some of my guilt, I bring along Windpipe No. 1. Wearing round sunglasses at nighttime and a flashy pink knit hat and using a cane even though I can walk perfectly fine, I'm a very suspicious nightwalker.

I believe that those under 15 shouldn't be allowed to spend the night somewhere and those 15 and up have a curfew of 11. By Earth standards it's only 9:32 pm so it's perfectly fine to enjoy some light target practice. Besides, I luckily had some change in my wallet and this is the town where the night never ends, Las Veg... Atami!

“Huh?”

Opening the door at almost the exact same time, a little girl all bundled up comes sneaking out. She sees me and immediately stops.

“You're not... on your way to the toilet, are you? It's a little shabby here, but there's a bath and toilet connected to your room. So that means, you're running away?”

Greta silently shakes her head. I find it hard to believe that a ten year old would sneak out for a night on the town, so I can only assume that the elementary school girl's leaving is an assassin's escape.

“Ah, that's fine. If you're going to escape, now's the time to do it... is what I'd really like to say.”

Letting a little girl walk around alone at night and perhaps letting her get involved in some sort of accident is weighing on my conscience. Pushing open the door, I point to the two empty beds.

“Go back to your room and go to bed.”

She shakes her head again in refusal. And then, she opens her mouth for the first time in a while.

"I'm looking for someone. I saw them this afternoon."

"You're looking for someone? How do you know someone in this touristy town? Ah, are you from here? Were you raised in this resort town?"

"No."

Oh man, this kid only speaks in single words and phrases. But now that I'm listening, her voice is low for a ten year old girl. Not so low that it was manly, but it sounded devoid of innocence. I wonder when she learned to speak while suppressing her emotions.

"Hey now, think hard. Was it really them? Are you sure you didn't just mistake them for that person? Hey wait."

Without even waiting for me to finish speaking, she began to walk down the wooden hallway.

"I have something for them."

"Something for them? ... But you can't walk around town by yourself at night! You're going to get kidnapped by some kind-looking man."

Well, she might be fine since she's not wearing ruby slippers.

As if I was chasing after my daughter, the two of us left the hotel. The town was bright and energetic, but the sounds I hear aren't from the Electrical Parade, but from drunks, flirty women, and swearing from gambling halls.

"However you look at it, it seems like this isn't really a place the two of us belong."

Even so, the elementary school student keeps pushing her way through the streets and a middle-aged drunken man approaches her. He had a splendid drunken stagger, but now wasn't the time to be admiring that. What if he sexually harassed her or something? I pulled her away, but unlike before, she didn't scream. Yuuri Shibuya has gained affection points.

As I was thinking that, I saw a lady clutching her stomach and crouching down in a dim part of the roadside and none of the passersby stopped to help her. Maybe she was pretending to be struck by a chronic illness and was really a pickpocket like on period dramas. In any case, I had a child with me and I decided it was best to avoid risky behavior so I just grip Greta's warm hand. If the lady really was sick with a stomach ache, someone would definitely help her. I tell that to myself and move to walk past her but...

"Are you alright?"

It was contrary to my middle class sense of justice, but my mouth and body moved on their own.

I look into the face of the squatting woman. Her lips were so pale, it was obvious even in the unnatural light of the shopping district.

"... my stomach hurts... I'd really appreciate it if you'd let me ride on your back."

"That's fine."

As long as I was careful not to get my wallet taken, giving her a ride on my back was okay. Handing Greta Windpipe No. 1, I move to place a hand on the woman's hunched back.

"Hey you! What are you doing with my woman!?"

With the angry words coming at me from over my shoulder, my hand stops immediately. Damn! She wasn't a pickpocket, it was a straight up blackmailing scheme!

"I hope you don't think you'll just get away with putting your hands on another man's woman."

It was a very clichéd threat. Hesitantly turning around, I saw a group of three ill-bred looking men. They had long straight hair parted down the middle like a bunch of folk singers had back in the day. Their muscles were bulging and they all looked fairly strong.

"If you just empty yourself out, we'll be in a better mood."

"No way. First of all, I haven't been constipated lately, and second of all, it's just absurd that emptying myself out would put *you* in a better mood."

Even if I act tough I'm outnumbered and with a child. Thinking that in the end my kindness is going to be defeated by evil and I'll end up having to pay them, I feel like crying in embarrassment and frustration. It's not too late young ones, won't you try repenting with a 'never mind?'

The hand I had moved to defend my wallet to the last was grabbed from behind. Pulled with all of their strength, I'm forced a few steps backwards.

"This way!"

The owner of the voice drags us through the nighttime shopping district at a run. The pale green hem of their slip dress is lifted in the wind. Panicking, I return my gaze to the back of our savior's head. The swaying locks of their dirty blonde hair are cut off at the nape of their neck. Their thin, long, sun-tanned legs are kicking up as high as an athlete's.

We ran for about five minutes. In the light of a dim-lit back alley that you wouldn't expect from a main street, the girl finally stops. Having run a mid-distance race at full speed, Greta and I are completely exhausted, but this wild goat of a girl just pants lightly.

"Those guys are persistent, but we should be fine this far away. You had a cane so I was worried if you'd be able to run, but you're not injured or sick, huh?"

"Oh... I was told... to stop... using it... Anyway.... thanks... you saved... us... But you know... you're really fast!"

"I loved running when I was a child. If I was a man, I'd have liked to deliver letters."

It doesn't seem particularly related to postal delivery, but I imagine the courier painted on the side of delivery trucks and think that it's juuuust a little impossible. (1)

"Huh?"

I'd seen Wild Goat Girl before. With her non-existent-breast cleavage and the thin clothes trying to accentuate it.

"Are you the girl who hit on us earlier this evening?"

"That's right, young man with the child."

She holds up her palms.

"It's alright, I won't hit on you anymore."

"Hey, those under 15 have an 11 o'clock curfew... oh I guess it's still early. But still, a middle-school student walking around at this time of night with those super exposing, sexy clothes isn't right!"

I'm giving her an old-man's lecture right after I'd just got done thanking her. Acting hypocritical is a personality trait I hate, but I don't want this kind girl to live so dangerously.

"I might seem like an idiot for saying this after you saved me, but where do you live? I'll walk you home."

Wild Goat Girl furrows her eyebrows as if she's troubled by this and is smiling only with her mouth.

"You can't take me home; it's far away."

"So you really were planning on spending the night somewhere. Somewhere like the room of someone you were flirting with."

"Yeah, I do that too, but... I usually stay in the store. You walked by it before, right?"

"The store... you mean you're camping out there? ... Hey, you know it's really not good to date people for money and stuff like that. Although me saying this like a goody-goody is kind of embarrassing."

"Eh?"

For example, if I forced these honor student ideals that've come right out of some middle school student's diary on the girls at my high school, they'd call me annoying or bat me away. As a joke, the entire class would ignore me starting the next day.

But I'd probably say it anyway. I believe I'd be able to force a smile as well.

If a good-hearted friend of mine tried to do something unethical, no matter what the result was, I'd say it just like I am now.

"I know it's *really* annoying that I sound like your parents or your teachers, but in this case they kind of have a point, and you know, me saying something so shamelessly is kinda, well, you might even say 'It's my life!' or something like that, but you, you should take... take better care of yourself, or something."

The under-15 girl who wanted to become a postal worker is staring at me with red-brown eyes, her lips slightly parted.

Please someone tell me I'm right. Give me a pat on the back. Take away this embarrassment. But even if nothing gets solved, I'm going to say it anyway. In short...

"I'm against making out without love! Here, put this on!" (2)

Trying to hide my embarrassment in vigorous movement, I rip off my down jacket. It's a lot heavier than a 'Made in Modern Japan' version, but the warmth is the same.

"... Thank you."

"Ah, yeah, and anyway, your home. Even if it's far, I'll take you there. You saved me so I'll handle the bus fare... oh there's no buses. Carriage fare, then. If you spend the night at a store, your parents will worry, you know? If you worry them too much, they'll age prematurely."

Talking about parents and homes, the silent child crouches down.

"I'm not talking about you, Greta. I'm not going to force you to go home. Right now I'm talking about Wild Goat Girl. I'm talking about her home."

"Wild Goat? Is that me? My name is Izura. I got it from the last princess of Svelera."

I've heard that name before, but I'll start with the place name.

"Svelera? You live in Svelera?"

"My home and family is in the country even now. I guess it's been three months since I came to Hildyard."

This is no longer a conversation where I can make a fuss over carriage fare. Fare for a two-night, three-day sea voyage wasn't something I could take care of with pocket change.

"Why did you specifically come here from Svelera... why did you run away from home?" (3)

"I didn't run away from home!"

Wild Goat Girl's, or rather, Izura's red-brown eyes clouded with tears. Perhaps thinking it bad, she roughly shakes her head and wipes them away.

"I wanted to stay with my family but... There's nothing left in Svelera. In order for my family to

survive, I had to come here to work.”

What!? But the rain they were wishing for fell! Even if it was just the one part, wasn't that part of the suffering in their rough environment taken care of?

Like I'm replaying a DVD, in my brain I relive the incident from four months ago.

If it would rain, Nicola said that everything would get better in Svelera. If it would rain, the people wouldn't have to live in thirst, they wouldn't have to buy imported alcohol and fruit, the wells and fields would have water, grass would grow and they'd even be able to raise livestock.

That rain fell.

“Then Wild-... Izura, are you working in Hildyard for living expenses? So you were hitting on me for rent... I'm sorry...”

“It's nothing to apologize for. Besides, you haven't done anything wrong to me. Hey, you even lent me your jacket. Since I've come here, you're the nicest customer I've had.”

On the other end of the narrow street, a warm light was coming closer. It would swing back and forth and then stop, gradually getting larger.

“... I'm hungry,” Greta murmured as the smell of soup spread in the air.

“Hi... Higomokos....?”

“No. Hinomokou.”

As far as literacy rate goes, the child is about 7% smarter than me at the moment.

In a swords and magic world with demons and a Demon King, there was a ramen stand.

On the other side of a curtain that said ‘Hinomokou,’ an obstinate old man was stirring a pot with his super-secret soup base.

Around that time, Wolfram was having a dream.

Yuuri screamed, “I'm against making out without love!” and he replied with “If you're talking about love, it's right here,” but in his mind he was thinking, ‘what does he mean, ‘making out?’”

(4)

His snore was ‘ghghpihh-ghghpihh’ as always.

Have a nice dream.

(1) For those who want to see the courier he's talking about
[\[Spoiler to pic\]](#)

(2) I'd like to point out here that at this point, Yuuri has not put two and two together and realized that Izura is a full-on prostitute. It's obvious to the reader, but with the words Yuuri's using, it's plain that he thinks she's just like one of those school-girl 'prostitutes' in Japan who, because many students are forbidden to have jobs by their school, are getting their spending money from creepy old men in exchange for hanging out with/dating/occasionally making out with them. Sex isn't necessarily always part of the deal, but it's still creepy and morally ambiguous – especially for Yuuri, Champion of Justice.

(3) Yuuri actually messes up here and accidentally says 'shukke'(become a monk) before correcting himself. It's a throwback to the joke from a few chapters ago with Yuuri's note to Günter.

(4) The letter 'H' (for 'hentai') is written here, signifying 'ecchi,' which in this context is a euphemism for making out (but it can mean anything from slightly lewd/pervy thoughts to actual sex). Seeing that it's a sort of Japanglish version of an abbreviation of a Japanese word, I'm pretty sure that even Conrad wouldn't understand it XD In retrospect, Izura probably didn't know what it meant either~

* * * * *

Even though he's a white man no matter how you look at him, he's got a crew cut and Japanese style twisted headband. His eyebrows are prominent and scraggly, and his bulging chest is peeking out of his animal hide jacket. I wonder if he's gotten all macho-muscled from making noodles every day.

"Brother, you're a real man for lending a woman your jacket nei?"

"Nei?" Well, I *am* a man..."

Eating ramen on a cold night is appealing, but what was handed to us was a soup that's hard to call a Chinese dish. The bowl is filled with amber-colored broth right up to the brim with a shrimp and clam topping and the noodles are 100% semolina flour cooked to a perfect al dente. The contents of this bowl are...

"... Seafood spaghetti?"

"No, hinomokou. It's food they serve at the palace in Zorashia nei."

"It's palace food!? But, what's 'nei'..."

Deciding children are first, I push the bowl in front of Greta. I lightly tap the wobbly bench next to me for Izura, who looks like she's uncomfortable standing.

"Sit down, Izura. I'll buy. Think of it as thanks for saving us."

"But-"

"That's nice nei, seeing a customer treating a prostitute to some warm food. You're going to make me cry nei."

"Prostitute!?"

Maybe because my voice sounded hysteric, Greta raises her face out of the bowl. The strand of spaghetti she was slurping up is hanging out of her mouth.

"Weren't you just messing around for some change? A prostitute is well, you know, a profession, and if you're in a profession that makes you a pro!? A professional... uh, sex worker? A person in the sex industry?"

I wonder if that's the proper term for it. From a modern-day Japan, sports loving high school boy's perspective, I only ever hear the term 'prostitute' in old, drunken songs my father sang.

"The sex work... or rather, prostitution I guess... even though you're so young!? You're still in your teens, and not even halfway through them yet. Even if you gain four or five years you still won't be legal, you know!? You absolutely should not be involved in sex work or prostitution! Uh well, minors pursuing jobs in the sex industry will create a problem in the infrastructure of the country..."

While I'm spouting out ideals from the side of my personality fueled by middle-class justice, the imagination of the 'healthy and dirty-minded 15 year old boy' side of my personality was going ahead at full speed. A girl this young and cute doing 'this' and 'that.' Once the image pops into my head, I can't get it out no matter how hard I try.

"Anyway, stop that sort of work immediately! If there's a problem with your boss... ah damn it!"

I'm so embarrassed I feel like my face is going to light in fire. I feel like, no I want to explode from my feelings of guilt and disgust.

"What are you thinking, damn it!? You should be ashamed of yourself! In any case Izura,

you can't continue prostituting. You shouldn't ever go back to that shop. If you have nowhere to stay... ah."

After taking two, three steps back and clasping her hands together, she turns on her heel and runs. With her athlete-worthy legs, I can't even see her back after a few moments. Did she realize her lack of morals or was she just not able to eat my ramen?

"Clothes," said Greta, her head still turned in that direction. Wild Goat Girl had run off wearing my jacket.

"Who cares about the coat! Ah, I'm horrible! While I was saying all that, there was some unbelievably perverted stuff going on in my brain..."

"Brother, don't get so down on yourself."

The old man in the shop, pectoral muscles twitching, gives me some spaghetti soup. In the middle of the steaming bowl, there was a curled up, scarlet shrimp.

"You're a good person nei. I'm impressed. At the very least, have some hinomokou poured in this family heirloom, cheer up and get home."

"Family heirloom?"

It's a ramen bowl that is clashing with the romantic, swords and magic atmosphere of this world with its bright red, Chinese style patterns. I imagine if I ate it all, there'd be a dragon painted on the bottom.

"You might even be able to see your future on the surface of the clear broth."

"My future? No way."

When I casually look down, there's a woman's face showing on the surface of the thin, amber broth. She has short hair and a boyish face and eyes of a strange color I've never seen before.

"Uwah!"

My back straightens reflexively. That's my future!? That was a girl's face, not mine. So does that mean I'm going to date that girl in the future!? I can finally get a female girlfriend!? Well guys can't be a girlfriend, anyway.

Glancing to the side, I see Greta peering into my bowl. Oh, that's the face that was in my soup.

"It was you."

That's right. The future isn't something you can easily understand. Like I'm going to let some old guy in a ramen stand tell my future.

Paying with the change in my pocket, we left the hinomokou store. However, since we ran so much, I have no idea where we are. I couldn't see any hints in the dark as to which direction the hotel was.

Greta has nestled her warm body against mine and is grabbing onto my right hand.

"It'll be fine. For now, let's just go towards where there's light. Once we get out on the main street, it'll be easy to figure it out."

I've got Windpipe No. 1 in my left hand and a child in my right. Luckily, at least my stomach was full so I could walk forward without worries. The alley gradually widened and we came out into the open.

Under the high moon and twinkling stars, there are several huge tents lined up.

"Ah, this place was on the way."

I looked around for the main street in the circus plaza. If we can cut through the back way here, it'll be a straightforward walk back to the hotel. In the far distance, I can see a bright haze. The front entrance must be over there.

"It's pretty far, but can you walk?"

I can feel her nod through my arm.

The events for the day seem to have ended and the surroundings are growing quiet.

I'm noticing for the first time now that I'm seeing it from the back, but there are three large tents that the sightseers can enter and then some small bungalows serving as sleeping facilities for the troupe members. Everyone's probably sleeping in preparation for tomorrow's show.

Greta stops abruptly.

"What is it?"

"I heard something."

"Well of course you heard something. People are living ther- ... hey."

Pulled along by the now suddenly running child, I slam my right foot down as if I'm falling on it. I'm now completely ignoring the warnings of the veteran health care provider, Gisela.

"Hey wait you! You can't just go in to places like..."

Using some sort of underhanded trick, Greta rips open the cloth seams and enters the backstage of the freak show. There are several cages the size of small trucks in the room and a three-headed animal is casually yawning. It's that smell unique to livestock. The largest one moos.

"Mosa--!" (1)

"Freaky animals!" Greta exclaims happily, holding a lamp from the corner. It's the first time I've seen her acting like a child.

"Shh, Greta. This isn't some freaky animal; it's just a normal cow."

"But it only has two horns. Usually they have five, right?"

"From my point of view *those* would the freaky ones."

Because it would be dangerous to let a child carry around a flame, I hold the slightly hot, golden object and point the light into the cage. I notice that there's a slip of what looks like a bill of money under the straw that an animal is curled up on.

"Someone dropped their money there. What a waste. Denko's gonna cry." (2)

Sticking Windpipe No. 1 through the bars of the cage, I try and drag the money out. If I can just push the dry grass to the sides...

"But man this is a serious stink... huh?"

There wasn't just one single bill of money, but a mountain of thick bundles. I pull one out with the T-shaped part of my cane.

"Eh!? No way!"

The bundle was so thick and heavy, if these were Natsume Sousekis, this would be around 200,000 yen. If these were Fukuzawa Yukichis, it'd be 2,000,000 yen. If these were Nitobe Inazous... that's hard to calculate.(3) But under the straw, these same bundles are spread all over.

"Hey, why is there so much money here?"

"Mosa--!"

There's no point in asking a cow.

But why would they think of hiding this much money in this bizarre spot? And on top of that, the bills in the bundle are all unwrinkled and brand new. What's the advantage in getting new money covered in animal feces and urine? If my banker father found out about this, he'd bawl his eyes out. I bring it closer to my nose as if I'm about to smell something scary.

"Uwah, gross!"

As I thought, or as I feared, it smells of ammonia so bad it could be an insect repellent. I drop it without thinking. It makes an especially loud noise as it hits the dry ground and flips over.

"... huh?"

The reverse side is blank.

"F-fake money?"

There are cranes on the back of Souseki and pheasants behind Yukichi. There's a high probability that these cheap, one-sided prints are still being worked on.

And they've hidden this in-progress counterfeit money in a safe place.

Have I just discovered something I was not supposed to see? The best course of action should be to retreat immediately and leave the rest to the police. I don't know if it'd be the police, the FBI, or the Secret Service, though.

I shove two or three bills in my pocket for evidence, and I call out to the child next to me.

"I'll let you see the animals tomorrow after we have properly paid the entrance fee, so tonight we should leave quickly."

My fingertips touch something wet.

"Hey Greta, your nose is running. Well I guess since it's proof that you're healthy it's fine... huh?"

A dog!? Startled, I turn around and see a sturdy animal that looks like a Japanese Mastiff. It's baring its canines shiny with drool at me in a silent battle stance.

I thought up a little joke that a doggy is by my side so this is a 'doggycide,' but it wouldn't understand the pun. (4)

"Gah, stop! Please forgive me, madam!"

I'm pushed down and trapped with just one of its front legs.

"If you don't want this brat to stop breathing, put down what you have and behave."

Standing there is a man with a body build like a bouncer wearing a Russian style fur hat and holding Greta down with one hand.

-
- (1) This was some made up animal noise. It kinda looks like an unfinished word now that I've typed it, lol. To be honest, every time the topic of animal noises pops up in this series, I immediately think of this [Family Guy clip](#) XD It was very tempting to type 'shazzuuuu.'
- (2) Reference to Denko Bundan, the former mascot character of TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company). She would give tips for saving energy and money and is still famous despite being decommissioned, especially in the Kanto area. I guess you can compare her to Smokey the Bear (although he gave wildfire prevention tips ^-^).
- (3) This book was written in 2002. Before 2004 (when all the banknotes in Japan were redesigned because of the massive amounts of counterfeits), Natsume Souseki was the guy on the 1000 yen bill and Nitobe Inazou was on the 5000 yen bill. Fukuzawa Yukichi survived the redesigns and is still on the 10,000 yen bill. ANYWAY, this all means that there's roughly 200 bills in that bundle. If you change this sentence to use American currency, it'd be something like, 'If these were Alexander Hamiltons, this would be around 2000 dollars. If these were Benjamin Franklins, it'd be 20,000 dollars. If these were Ulysses S Grants... that's hard to calculate.' Of course, I don't know many people who can name the guy on the ten dollar bill right off the top of their heads. Testing that theory, I asked a friend of mine and she said Thomas Jefferson XD I'm sorry if you're not American and/or everything I just typed now was pure gibberish ^-^;;
- (4) Oh god, puns again XD Luckily, I didn't have to think too hard for this one! The original Japanese is 'wanko ga soba ni iru kara, wankosoba' which means 'a doggy(wanko) is by my side(soba) so 'doggy-side.'" Yeah, the English version practically wrote itself. ANYWAY, 'wankosoba' is *actually* a never-ending bowl of soba noodles. They just keep refilling your bowl until you're stuffed. In this usage, 'wanko' means a wooden bowl and soba is soba.

Chapter 5

He's lived for a long time, but he never knew a place like this existed.

Using the last bit of strength in his body, Günter von Christ braced his legs in order to not collapse on the bed behind him.

"With this, the first day of your trial period for becoming a monk has ended. The vow of silence is lifted in your personal rooms, so feel free to speak as you wish."

As soon as he's told that, he opens his mouth wide like a fish. Next to him is the middle-aged, former soldier, seemingly at peace with his completely different look. This unlucky man's name is Dacascos. The chance visit to the king's office with a message was the beginning of his misfortune.

Searching for Yuuri who had disappeared after leaving a letter, they have come to a monastery. Joining the order and becoming monks, the men are in a place where the daily life is nothing but prayer for the peace of the True King's noble spirit and the future of the Great Demon Kingdom.

Actually, as the royal advisor, Günter has gone to all the ceremonies and blessings at the Shrine of the True King. As such, he has met many people who have come into contact with the True King's noble spirit and work as priestesses. But, they are all women there. They have long hair and they also have eyebrows.

But the monk standing in front of him is a man and didn't have hair on his head, eyebrows, eyelashes, nose hair or even ear hair. They have shaved all the hair from their body in order to decrease the amount of different aspects between the True King and themselves as much as possible. Günter was given special consideration, but Dacascos, who he had forced to come along with him, had not been able to escape this. Having all his hair removed, he no longer even vaguely resembled the soldier he once was.

To think that there was a monastery full of men like this just a half day's ride through the mountains from Blood Pledge Castle.

"Well then, let's call it a day. Let us carry out tomorrow's dawn prayer in tranquility, shall we?"

The move he made when he said 'shall we' at the end, bending his knees and thrusting one foot's toes behind him, was the greeting here. It was a pose you see a lot in folk dances, but there's nothing cute about a monk doing it.

"Th-this was unexpected. To think that this dubious facility existed."

"More importantly Your Excellency... I don't think that His Majesty and the girl who attempted to assassinate him are here... I mean, it's all men here."

"But the trial period is three days. If we say anything along the lines of quitting on the first day, even if I'm one of the ten noble families, I have no idea how we will be treated."

"Oh, I forgot something important!"

As he was about to leave, the lead monk turned on his heel and came back. He starts digging out luxury items from Günter's excessive luggage.

"All pleasures are forbidden at this monastery. The only one allowed to let loose at night is His Majesty the True King. During this trial period, all objects of worldly pleasure will be confiscated. Alcohol, cards, face masks... what is this?"

“Ah, th- that’s-!”

Lord von Christ thrusts out his hand in a panic, but the green, mountain goat leather bound book finds its way into the hands of the lead monk. He flips through the pages. This is an emergency situation.

“A Love Diary Composed in Summer... this is a diary? Don’t worry, I’m not so rude as to read another’s diar... hm?”

If he still had eyebrows, they would have been drawn together in a frown right now.

“... His Majesty blessed me, who has devoted body and spirit to my work as tutor and advisor, with the words, ‘Without you, my country would not be complete. Günter, will you make history with me and never leave my side?’ Unable to suppress my tears of joy, I devote a kiss to His Majesty’s noble feet.”

“Ughyaa! Your Excellency! What the hell kind of things are you writing!?”

The victim is the former soldier. The lead monk continues reading indifferently.

“... My everything belongs to His Majesty if he so commands....”

“Eghhh! Please stop, have mercy!”



“Why are *you* suffering, Dacascos!?” said the lead monk as he closed the green book. Perhaps because his face is so hairless, it’s practically emotionless.

“I’ll confiscate this as well until the last day. However...”

However?

Both Günter, who’s almost in tears, and Dacascos, who’s covered in tears, freeze while waiting for the next words.

“To record the days between you and His Majesty the Demon King as a love story... I feel this is something that a humble servant and body of one who serves the noble soul of the True King shouldn’t say but...”

‘Then don’t say it!’ Dacascos says in his mind. There wasn’t really a pause for it though and the mental thought overlaps with the lead monk explaining with a pitying face that all life under the True King is equal, but...

“... You’re really a horrible person...”

Dacascos could feel the blood pressure of the beauty next to him shoot through the roof. There’s no time to calm him down or stop him.

“Like a bunch of monks could ever understand the love I have for His Majesty!”

His Excellency Günter von Christ, beautiful hair disheveled, runs away.

* . * . * . *

As there are all sorts of types who like animals, if there’s someone who deserted Conrad’s troupe after falling into a sand bear hole, then there’s someone similar who’ll be calmed down by being in this room.

“This is great huh, Greta, it’s a whole bunch of freaky animals.”

From the walls of the room, there are a bunch of beast heads sticking out. The large ones are deer, bear, hippo. The small ones are rabbit, ferret, weasel, mink. They even have them here?

“... This is... a, a mini stegosaurus, right?”

“It’s a zomosagori dragon!”

That’s one of the animals in my limited imitation repertoire. Dinosaurs are popular with children in any world.

Dragged from the tent circus true to its name by the scruffs of our necks, the place we’ve been thrown into is a stuffed animal hell. The cold glass eyes are creepy. It’s like they’re not thinking anything.

The door won’t open even if we ram into it or kick it.

“Who’s there?” A forlorn voice called from farther in the room.

I turn around in the weak light. Huddled together against the curly grained wooden wall are two figures. One is lying down on the floor, obviously not feeling well.

“Izura?”

Red-brown eyes turn to me. The girl lying next to her also opens her eyes slightly to look in my direction. Thinking she looks familiar, I remember she’s the girl I met this afternoon. Instead of a blanket, what’s draped over her is the down jacket I’d lent her. The warmth in my hand leaves me and Greta runs forth and places a hand on Izura’s cheek.

"Why are you here? What happened to your face? Who hit you!?"

"I should be asking about you, mister-"

"It's Yuuri!"

Surprised, I stare at the back of her instant ramen head. After lowering her voice from a shout, the child repeats my name.

"It's Yuuri and Greta. Right?"

"Ah, yeah."

She was so uncharacteristically emotional, my response was a little late. The girl lying down gives a low moan. Coming closer and looking into her face, I see she looked really bad.

"Nina's cold has gotten worse. I'm fine. I just got hit because I couldn't find any customers. But, I'll just be in the way until I can appear in the store again."

In other words, this is the stuffed animal storeroom for Izura's store, and the counterfeit money I found is deeply related to these people. As a violent brothel making minors work in the sex trade and creating counterfeit money, they're like a den of evil.

"Do you have any medicine? Her fever hasn't gone down since this evening."

"In a cold place like this, you wouldn't get any better."

I end up stripping off another piece of clothing for Izura in her slip dress and placing a hand on Nina's cheek. Just as I thought with her pale face and dry lips, her skin is hot.

"Yuuri can heal her."

"Huh?"

Hey hey, I thought you were done speaking. What are you saying now?

"You can heal her right? You healed my fever. You healed it just by holding my hand."

"Hey now, there's no way I can perform that kind of spirit healing-type technique. That was due to the anti-fever medicine. You took some medicine, kept yourself warm and got lots of sleep..."

It's too late. The three girls are staring at me with hope. Well, I might be able to at least give them some peace of mind. If I believe Gisela, it's not impossible for me. Remembering what she did, I softly grasp Nina's pale and dry wrist. Was it talk to them and draw out their vitality?

"Um... you have to want to get better. What do you want to do when your fever goes down? It's winter so, that's right, how about baseball?"

'Is that all you think about?' I berate myself.

"... When I get better... I'll work and get money."

Maybe it's because she hasn't spoken in a while, but her voice sounds hoarse and stuck in the back of her throat. Her light colored eyes are cloudy with fever.

"I'll get lots more customers and I'll even be able to send money back home."

"No, aren't there any better jobs? You're still a middle school student so you should go back home and look for work there. Like at a convenience store or a family restaurant, you've gotta find a part-time job suited for girls."

"There's nothing in Svelera," Izura interjects, hugging her knees. It was an empty and cold voice.

"Nina and I have been together since we were little. We were raised in the same village. Until a half a year ago, we worked in the esoteric stone mines, but one day the stones just stopped coming up."

“Eh...”

I wonder if that's because our group searching for the Demon Flute laid waste to the mines. There was one place where I definitely destroyed a mine with my own hands. But, that was an internment camp so it shouldn't have anything to do with their lost place of work.

“B-but rain fell so shouldn't your daily life have gotten a bit easier?”

“Even though it's raining we can't grow crops. There aren't any seeds. We ate them all. Even if the grass is green, it doesn't mean the cows and goats will grow fat. We didn't have any in the first place. With the long drought and food shortage, they died or we ate them. There's nothing left in Svelera. All there is is water and domineering soldiers! The army doesn't pay... All the men who came to our village told us that there's work in Hildyard and if you want us to take your daughters there, we'll give you a deposit. So, the adults in the village got together and had a meeting... We didn't want to do this kind of work, but going against the decision of the older women would be a crime...”

“That's...”

Hearing the end of Izura's sentence tremble, I swallow my next words.

Doesn't that mean that their parents sold them? Although they might not have known what kind of work it was. But still, is this all because of the excessive things I did in Svelera?

Damn it.

Didn't they say they wanted rain? They wanted water. They wanted rain.

“... ow...”

I hadn't intended to squeeze her hand, but the sick girl twists her body in an effort to escape.

“I'm sorry, I-”

“What kind of work did you want to do?”

Drawing everyone's gaze at once, the ten year old's cheeks redden. With her hands pressed to her sides, she sits there, swaying lightly. Like she was going along with some rhythm, she lightly taps her fingernails on the floor.

“Izura has fast legs so she wanted to become a mail deliverer, right? What kind of work did you want to do, Nina? What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I... wanted to be a teacher.”

The sick girl forces a laugh. A crack forms in her fever-dried lips and a thin line of red wells up.

“A teacher, huh? But isn't being a teacher hard work?”

“But, teachers are awesome. They can write, and they can read books. They can go to school every day.”

“The ones who have to go to school every day are the students, not the teachers.”

“Students hardly ever get to go to school. I mean, they have to work.”

So that's how it is in Svelera?

The palm I have resting on Nina's skin gradually begins drawing in the heat. I'm assaulted by waves of pain and my thoughts become blurred by a difficulty to breathe and listlessness. I desperately resist letting my head drop forward by screwing up my eyes.

“What do you want to be, Greta?” Izura asks the younger girl while unconsciously stroking her swollen cheek.

“I...”

Like when I was on the boat, pain and heat run through my body and disperse along my medulla. And then like nothing happened, the heat and weight subside. Did that heal Nina's cold?

"I wanted to be a child."

"But you are a child!" everyone yells.

"No. I wanted to be someone's child, a child with a mother and father."

Greta's voice goes back to being young and innocent from the voice low for her age in which I couldn't read any emotion. Threading her fingers behind her back, she continues tapping on the floor.

"I lived in Svelera's palace. But I wasn't a child from there. The last day I saw her, mother told me 'Greta, from now on you're a child of Svelera. But those two over there might not raise you as their child. So from now on, you can't trust anyone. You have to live trusting only in yourself.'"

Her mother told her that on their last day together... Hearing her confession, I think of my own mother.

What was the last thing we talked about? It feels like a really long time ago. It was a summer morning. It was the morning of July 28th. The cicadas were buzzing noisily. On my way out to Sea World, my mother handed me a milk pack and said:

"Hey Yuu-chan, is it a girlfriend? A girlfriend? You have to properly introduce her to Mama!"

"No, it's Murata. Ken Murata."

"Ah, Murata. Is Murata well? That's right, while love is important, friendship is even more important."

I didn't say goodbye or even see you later. I didn't even think that I might not ever see her again. My father had left for work and my brother was out camping with his club. I should have at least said a proper farewell.

My nose started to sting. Trying to cover it up, I push my sunglasses back up.

Then I hear the rest of Greta's words.

"Like my mother said, His Majesty and Her Royal Highness of Svelera didn't make me their daughter. We didn't talk and we didn't even see each other much. But I wanted to be a child of Svelera. So I thought if I did something that they'd like, they would be happy and praise me and make me a child of the country."

At the topic of the king and queen, Izura and Nina, common citizens, freeze up. Greta's manly eyebrows are drawn together and her eyelashes are trembling as if she might start crying.

"Four months ago in the castle, there was suddenly a lot of bad talk about the demons. Whenever I happened to meet with His Majesty and Her Royal Highness, all they would talk about was how the demons infuriated them. So I thought if I killed the king in the demon country, His Majesty and Her Royal Highness would be happy and tell me how great I was. I thought they'd make me a child of Svelera."

A child this young thought of such things.

"So, I made a deal with a demon in the dungeon and we escaped the castle together. They brought me to the castle in the Great Demon Kingdom, and I tried to kill Yuuri."

She thought up these horrible things with all of her might.

"... I didn't think he was a good person... They said so many bad things about him, so it

didn't even occur to me that Yuuri could have been a good person. I don't need to be anyone's child anymore."

Tears fall on olive skin.

"I'm sorry, Yuuri."

"What are you saying!?"

There isn't really a reason I'm about to cry. The deer and bears and hippos would be crying too if they had tear ducts. In other words, it's the atmosphere. Yes, the atmosphere is dragging me along.

"What are you saying, Greta!? You're my hidden child, right!? In other words, you're not anyone's kid, you're already, definitely my child!"

"... Really?"

"Really!"

And I have been dragged along to this.

If my overprotective tutor heard this, it would definitely make him faint. Becoming a father so young... An unmarried, single father and, due to my age, a fashionable daddy. Wait, I'm not fashionable. But please for now, let this be a onetime thing. If I keep on getting kids, I'll be in trouble. I'm disturbed by my own proclamation. In this situation, I feel inexperienced as both a Demon King and a father.

This emotional scene of becoming a new father was cut off by an unpleasant shriek.

Nina, despite having been in so much pain, threw off my hand and backed up to the wall.

"A demon!? He's a demon!?"

"Calm down! Calm down, Nina!"

"What do I do!? A demon touched me! A demon touched me! I'll be cursed! God will definitely punish me!"

Maybe because of the excitement, her complexion is better than a little while ago. It seems that I've succeeded in drawing out her will to live. Nina keeps screaming hysterically and hitting the wooden walls with all her might.

"Somebody come! There's a demon here, a demon! I'm gonna get killed!"

"Why!?"

Standing with her feet apart, Greta enters battle-mode. She has a determined and cool look just like when she came running at me with only a cheap knife in the office at Blood Pledge Castle.

"Why!? He helped you! He was kind to you! Why are you saying that!?"

"... It's okay, Greta. I'm used to it. You don't have to get mad."

"But..."

In Hildyard's pleasure town, no matter who the person, if they're a paying customer, they're accepted. But these girls are citizens of Svelera. Since they're from a place where you can be thrown into an internment camp just for falling in love with a demon, then I can understand the excessive reaction.

"It's pretty much always like this. More importantly, if the guards open the door from all this commotion, we can use that opportunity to escape."

The child gives me a face as if to ask 'are you okay with that?' I am okay with that, I'm your dad. Before she can tell me she understands, a presence comes close and stops nearby. After

the sound of a key being violently turned in a lock, the door bursts open.

"You guys are noisy-"

"Now!"

We tried to slip past him on both sides, but maybe because I was trying to protect my right ankle, my dash forward was a moment late. A little bit faster than me, the man's hand grabs the hem of my shirt and I stumble. I pointlessly swing around Windpipe No.1, but it hits nothing but air.

"Yuuri!"

The young but brave child moves to bite the guard's arm.

"You brat!"

"Greta run! Go back to the hotel and get Conrad-"

Bam! After a dull noise, the man's eyes roll back into his head and he falls to his knees. From there, he slowly falls forward.

"Go!"

The girl shamelessly exposing her long, sun-tanned legs and wearing the sweater I lent her, is standing there holding a stuffed animal head with both hands.

"Izura... did you hit him with that?"

It doesn't have a heart, but there are tears in the deer's eyes as well.

"It's alright, go. Get away."

"But then you... Hey, come with us."

Wild Goat Girl shakes her head.

"Nina's here."

That friend is clinging to Izura's legs, repeatedly asking why she's helping a demon.

"Because I know he's a good person. Go, hurry! It's alright. I'll just say that this fell."

"Izura..."

"My mother-"

Greta shouts to the older girl as she lets go of my hand.

"I think my mother would be happy that there's a just and brave girl who has her name."

Now that I think about it, the tattoo on Greta's shoulder was the name of her beloved mother.

Catching the girl's faint smile in the corner of my eye, we step over the guard's body and start running. We need to get back to the hotel and rethink our plans. Conrad and Wolfram will definitely lend me their wisdom.

From my first impressions, this building wasn't all that big. In order to be called a store, they wouldn't be able to brazenly pursue us in front of other clueless customers.

We run through winding hallways. There were times where we were cut off by people that seemed to be pursuing us, but we got through without any problems after a hit from Windpipe No.1. At first glance, it seemed to be just an old man's walking stick, but it's more suited for a career as a weapon than a walking aid. Gisela would grieve if she knew.

Running so many steps I want to look at a pedometer and after going down three staircases, we finally come out into a store-like area. There's a sparkling chandelier on the high ceiling and more than twenty girls are idling around on a platform.

On sofas set out on the floor, there are customers checking them out and customers who have already decided and are laughing and whispering together.

“... they’re all minors.”

The girls are letting out forced laughs or are silent and staring at the floor or using another of many self-defense techniques. In order for their own hearts to not be broken in this humiliating and unforgiveable act. In order to deal with this for their families.

“Greta, don’t look.”

We pass in front of an old man who’s not even trying to hide his triumphant smile as he sets a girl who’s still a seventh-grader on his knees. He sees the two of us and says something to an employee. A small and weak looking boy tells him that no, they are not from our store. Old man, no way were you looking at my kid like that. If you were, I’ll beat you so hard with this cane that no one will recognize you.

My mood is completely that of a father.

Around a few meters from the exit, I notice some men in black. Of course in reality, they don’t have the guts to wear black and are instead wearing ivory tops and bottoms. I was almost fooled by their pleasant masks, but judging from the bulging shoulders and thick necks, they’re quite the able-bodied bodyguards. And there’s two of them on each side smiling and greeting customers. We’ve got to get by them somehow. (1)

Trying to seem like we’ve finished with our business and are heading home, Greta and I hold hands and walk towards the exit looking like we might just start whistling at any second. Because there’s no way that someone would bring a child into a store like this, maybe I should pretend that I paid for a girl and am bringing them home? But Greta’s looks are the problem. She’s only about ten years old no matter which way you look at her. Now that we’ve come this far, there’s nothing we can do, so I pull out my trump card.

“It was lucky they let us use the bathroom, right, Greta?”

“Yeah.”

“But you were in there so long, Daddy got tired of waiting.”

“It wasn’t that long.”

“Excuse me, sir.”

I jump about four centimeters. With a superficial laugh, the man in ‘black’ calmly steps in front of us, blocking our way.

“Wh-wh-wh -what!?”

“One of the employees says you forgot something.”

There’s nothing to be done. And that was a great idea with the bathroom thing. Our pursuers slowly come up behind us. It probably wasn’t the guard who got hit with the deer head, but I expect a member from some brutish group. No matter which way we run, we’ll be met with defeat. If I could at least get Greta out of here...

Then, in order to greet an incoming customer, the man in black makes a small opening. It’s too small for me, but for a child...

“Now, Greta! Jump over my corpse and go!”

“Oh, that voice...”

At the head of the group of three people overflowing with dignity that just entered, a solidly built man stoops forward to peer at us. He’s an elegantly dressed, middle-aged gentleman.

There’s an intrepid smile under his beige mustache as he grabs my hand with callused fingers.

“Gya!”

Just as I was thinking that he was going to pull it in for a kiss, he rubs his mustache on the back of my hand. That’s just incredibly creepy for an entirely different reason.

“Just as I thought, it’s the man we owe our lives to.”

He kneels while putting his right hand on his hair that's the same color as his mustache.

“Eh!?”

He whips off his wig. Greta raises her voice in wonder. This is the perfect opportunity to understand foreign cultures.

A bald head shining in the light of the chandelier. It’s a foreign country’s elegant greeting of the rich and powerful.

“It’s been a while, Mr. Mitsuemmon.”

“... Mr. Shiny..?”

Hyscliff from Misshinai, proudly displaying his polished head, is standing in a model pose with his right foot forward. I’m disoriented by the strong glare.

(1) In case you’re wondering what the hell is going on here, in Japan, the people who work at restaurants (and sex shops), etc. who deal with the customers are called ‘black clothes.’ This is because they usually wear black. But of course, in this world, only demons (and more specifically, only the Demon King and their family members) wear black. So, Yuuri’s like ‘oh, there’s some black clothes, but they’re in white!’ It’s kind of a joke, but not really. More of an ironic musing on his part ^-^

Chapter 6

It was about five months ago.

Even more inexperienced as the Demon King than now, I, Yuuri Shibuya, left on a journey to search for the Demon Sword called Morgif. On a ship, I had met Mr. Hyscliff and danced a waltz with his around six year old daughter. In a stroke of bad luck, we were attacked by a pirate ship and before I knew it, I had saved them and had been named the man to whom which they owed their lives. For more details, consult Günter's diary.

Despite his appearance, he's a former Crown Prince of Cavalcade who fell in love with a Hildyard merchant girl, threw away his social status and eloped. So, is he in a hot-blooded romance or not?

"Ah, to meet in a place like this! It's been a while, Mr. Mitsuemmon! I'll never be able to repay you for what you... oh? Are you not with your hot-blooded fiancé today? And where is the master fencer, Kakunoshin?"

I can't tell him that we were travelling under fake names. In his mind, Conrad and I are still Mito Koumon and his companion Kakunoshin. How can I make an excuse after all this time?

"Actually I'm surprised, Mr. Hyscliff. Why is a man who's thrown away everything for his wife in a suspicious place like this?"

"'Suspicious' is a bit harsh! However, that's right. Since I have a devoted wife, today I've come here on business from far away Misshinai to have a meeting. At any rate, as the son-in-law of the Enuroy family, I cannot allow the amassed fortune of my father-in-law to be reduced. I have just now arrived here, but I wanted to start negotiations as soon as possible."

Son-in-law!? So he's the son-in-law.

"But enough about me, how have you been, Mr. Mitsuemmon? To relay my gratitude I chased after you all the way to Shimaron, but there were only balloon-like skins in the room you were confined in. I told them that they were skins you had shed and left behind so there would be no point in confining them, but the Shimaron soldiers and their superior officer all believed that they would eventually turn back into you. And now I'm meeting your beautiful self here outside of Shimaron."

"... Although unfortunately, I can't shed my skin."

"And who is this adorable young girl?"

Since he's the father of a six year old daughter, he sees children differently than I do. It'd be troublesome if he thought I had some sort of little girl fetish, so I told him the truth.

"This is Greta, my hidden child."

I've already begun telling this lie. It's a conditioned reflex.

"I used the bathroom," Greta said.

"That's right. And you took so long it got late."

"I told you, I wasn't that long!"

"Oh, what a smart child! Then, I'd like you to understand what I'm about to say. Miss Greta, I'd like to borrow your father. I have a very important issue that I absolutely must have his opinion on."

Because I'm freaking out after discovering that Mr. Shiny is involved with this shop, I can only

come up with the bad excuse of, 'but I have to get back to the hotel and check in with Con... Kakunoshin and children need to get their sleep or they won't grow.' However, the ever honest Hyscliff brushed that aside saying that his subordinates would relay the message.

The employees timidly cut into our conversation.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hyscliff, but Luis Biron is waiting..."

While his name sounds like a brand-name rip-off, this man seems to be the owner of this place. In other words, the inexcusable jerk who is Izura and Nina's boss and is making innocent young teens and preteens work in the sex trade.

If I'm with Hyscliff, even if I were to give that man a piece of my mind, there would be no danger of being attacked for being rude. In any case, if I can't escape right now, the smartest thing would be to go along with my acquaintance as the man who he owes his life to. As I'm coming to that decision, one of his subordinates leaves the store. If he's going off to report to Conrad, Mitsuemmon or Kakunoshin won't be on the lodging register.

If only he'd quick put his wig back on as soon as his greeting was over, but as we climb the stairs, Greta is completely entranced by his bald head. If she tells me she wants that kind of haircut after we go back to our country, how am I going to convince her otherwise?

And then there was a gold covered door, the only gorgeous thing around, with a painting of a familiar looking bear-like creature on it. I wonder if that's supposed to be their mascot character like in pro sports. But for some reason, the face is strangely scary. Kind of like Gizmo when he was up to something. (1)

Luis Biron was a small man that had a face that invited sympathy with a prominent jaw and eyebrows that slanted upwards near his nose. But above all that, with his straight hair parted down the middle, I immediately think of the nickname 'Kinpachi.' His morals are completely different, but he looks a lot like Kinpachi from the first season. The next best comparison would be an afghan hound. (2)

"You seem to be well, Mr. Hyscliff."

He steals a glance at me, the newcomer, as he speaks.

"And you, Mr. Biron, seem to be thriving more and more with your business. Ah, this person is Mr. Mitsuemmon, a crepe silk dealer from Echigo. Despite being so young, he's a cut above the rest and even I have to tip my hat to him. Wanting to have his opinion, I have brought him along to this meeting."

This evaluation is too much for this common, baseball brat.

"A-Allow me to introduce myself. I am Mitsuemmon. You don't have to write the 'Mitsu' in katakana and the 'emon' in hiragana. I don't have anything to do with Doraemon." (3)

While I'm giving this likely unintelligible introduction, my eyes are drawn to the red object in Mr. Biron's lap and I stop. He's petting it with his meticulously manicured nails as he sits on the gorgeous couch.

A lobster!? That's a lobster, isn't it? If it's red, it's already been cooked, right?

Looking around the room again, I see that this man has tons of things in this room that are just so bizarre my general knowledge can't make sense of them. Even though he's in his private room in his own shop, he has three bodyguards behind his chair. There's another in the recesses of the room, standing with a wastebasket on his head as a light shone on him. That one drew Greta's attention. That's understandable. Even for me, who's used to seeing period

dramas, seeing this real-life Komusou is really exciting.(4)

The man was tall and skinny and, if I had to say so, round-shouldered. From what I can see, the sword at his waist is so long I probably wouldn't have been able to even draw it from its scabbard.

The portrait on the wall had the same hairstyle as the real person, but its face was on par with an actor. Furthermore, the plate under the frame had a comment written on it along the lines of 'the world famous Luis Biron and the wholesale home appliance store.'

My literacy rate is on a steep climb.

"Getting to the point, Mr. Biron," Mr. Shiny began, not paying attention to me who, because the material in this couch is so soft, didn't even get shifted as he leaned forward. "I have a reason for calling on you this hour instead of meeting with you tomorrow morning as I would usually do. I wish to go over the business under development immediately. Yes, right now, this night."

"I fail to see your point."

"If you're going to play innocent I'll be blunt. Judging from how much the previous owner loved gambling, it's clear what methods you used to come into possession of the deed to this district. But, that is in the past and it is pointless to call a person no longer around foolish. However, four months after becoming the district of Biron, the western district has radically changed its image. Many customers lacking character have gathered and tenant disputes are never-ending. That's not all. As the owner of the southern district, I've had one of my own investigate and have found that there is morally bereft business being widely conducted."

The veins on Hyscliff's bare scalp slightly rise. It seems he's not just spouting off, but is truly angry from the bottom of his heart.

"I've just verified this with my own eyes, but just as my subordinate said, it was a sickening scene. Making even those who are not harlots take on customers and to exploit them without sharing any of the profit! Mr. Biron, I am here to warn you and make a demand. Immediately revise the constitution of your business and come forward with reparations to all of the people you have trodden upon. If you do not, I will make your immoral business known to the Hildyard royalty and you will be arrested!"

So in other words, in short, that means 'your business is too evil so stop making minors work?'

"That was good! I'm moved! You're great, Mr. Hyscliff from Misshinai!"

He's as awesome as Ichiro from Taiwan. (5)

Kinpachi, or Luis Biron, stops petting the lobster.

"And here I cancelled my other plans because the head of the Enuroy family was personally coming to meet with me and it turns out to be for having this foolish and hypocritical debate? If that's all you're here for, please leave immediately. I'm a very busy man."

"Busy? You're busy deceiving young girls from Svelera where the production of esoteric stones has stopped, cattle cannot be raised and there aren't even seeds for grain?"

Mr. Hyscliff turns harsh.

"What you're saying is unintelligible-pon."

Unintelligible-pon?

"I haven't said a single deceptive thing! Would I, the world famous Luis Biron, do something

so inhumane? We have properly signed contracts with their guardians and have taken custody of their daughters with mutual consent. I'm simply reaching out a hand to the people in Svelera where there is no work and completely-pon disregarding profit!

Co-completely-pon?

"Those contracts should be signed after you teach them to read. We have testimonies from many families in Svelera who claim they did not know the contents of those contracts. If you won't rethink your attitude, I could just take them straight to the royal government."

"Do so, if you wish. I have many acquaintances within the government. If you want, I'd be happy to introduce you to them."

The man sitting across from us playing the part of an outrageously evil man has quite literally set my insides to boiling. I grip my kneecaps to resist flipping my switch and yelling at this man because Hyscliff is here with me.

"If you won't change your mind after all I've said, there's no choice. I'll simply have to acquire your deed."

"Oh? And under what terms do you plan to do so? I've no intention-pon of giving it up even if you pooled together the entire Enuroy family fortune."

Is that some kind of speaking habit?

"If it's money I can make as much as I want in the future. I won't be moved by such an ordinary thing."

"Well, how about we gamble?"

Since I'd opened my mouth after being silent the whole time, the two merchants stare at me blankly.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Mitsuemmon?" Hyscliff asks.

"I don't know who you are or where you're from, Mitsuemmon, but this is not a discussion for a young person to intrude upon, Mitsuemmon or whoever."

Being called Mitsuemmon over and over again makes it sound like 'honwakapappa,' so stop it.

(6) Struggling to sit up from where I had sunk into the sofa, I take my eyes off the lobster and say:

"It's a deed you got from a bet anyway, right? Then you can risk it again in another bet."

"I see, I figured you were a properly raised boy and as I thought-pon, it seems your thought process is naïve as well. You don't have any experience with gambling. As long as I don't want money, I'll need something of greater value than the production rights in the western district. Can you find something like that so easily? Oh yeah, if you plan on betting the deed to the southern district, I'll decline your offer now. I don't need that boring place filled with bathhouses."

"Eh, Mr. Hyscliff owns the hot spring paradise? This might be a bad time, but can you do something about those super dangerous bikini thongs?"

"Oh? But they're quite popular with the ladies."

I guess everyone likes them.

Just as we had outworn our welcome, some other people enter with nice timing. They draw the gazes of everyone in the room.

"Oh, it's your fiancé and Mr. Kakunoshi--"

"Yuuri, you jerk!"

Raising his manicured eyebrows, Wolfram grabs my collar and lifts me up.

“Running around playing in the red-light district when you have someone like me... how frivolous can you be!?”

“Ugh, Wolf, I, I can’t, bre-breathe!”

“Do you have any idea how much Conrart lectured me because of this!?”

“It couldn’t have been more than three different ways! Seriously!? Pay attention! Stop shaking me! That’s it! I’m gonna suffocate so get off!”

After pulling his younger brother off of me, Conrad took a look at my light clothing and, without giving me a chance to refuse, wrapped his coat around me. The room wasn’t that chilly, but I was pretty cold.

“If you catch a cold after coming here to get treated in the hot springs, who knows what Günter will say to me. Honestly, after going out for some gallivanting, where exactly did you lose your coat?”

“Hey, the one who went out gallivanting with girls first was you, wasn’t it? Even though you have such a nice guy face, are you really called The Great Demon Kingdom’s Emperor of the Night?”

“I wasn’t going to hang out with girls. I just had something to give to an acquaintance. The child was sleeping soundly, and because I heard some suspicious breathing coming from the next room, I thought it would be impolite to stay and listen to the sounds of you making love so...”

“We weren’t making anything!”

That was me doing sit ups. We’re not a couple from fifty years ago so why would we come to a hot spring for our honeymoon. Anyway, please notice. We’re both guys, alright!?

Everyone in the room was dumbfounded, but Greta was watching the Komusou. Mr. Shiny reluctantly interjects into our conversation.

“Uh, Mr. Mitsuemon? Mr. Kakunoshin? Who are Yuuri and Conrart..?”

“Oh sorry, sorry. That’s me. I’m the crepe silk dealer from Echigo, Mitsuemon, with the pen name, Yuuri.”

“Your pen has a name?” (7)

Pretty boy, I’m not sure if you’re out of sorts, you were trying to make a joke, or if you’re just an airhead.

“Anyway, I’m glad you’re safe. We were looking everywhere. Did you protect him, Greta?”

When Conrad puts on his nice-guy smile and places his hands on Greta’s shoulders, her face lit up as she looked up at the tall adult. So this is how you’re supposed to touch girls. As a new daddy, this is a very important lesson.

And, it was only for a second, but Conrad’s gaze focused on the corner of the room.

The komusou swayed forward.

In the next moment, the man swiftly crossed the room with one, shuffling step and drew his ridiculously long sword and brandished it. Arching his back, he points the tip of the blade in his hand at his prey.

The person he’s announcing he’s going for a homerun with is... me!?

“..!”

I can’t even speak.

I can only duck down.

After reflexively closing them, I open my eyes again at the loud sound of metal clanging. The

impact sends a shockwave through the air and it hits my cheek along with some sparks. My sunglasses fly off and the room suddenly brightens. That's right. This isn't the time to be closing my eyes. I won't even be able to dodge like that.

Wondering why I'm staring at a light blue surface, I realize it's because all I can see is Conrad's back. Because I was standing there like an idiot, Wolfram roughly pulls me away.

"Did you get cut!?"

"... uh..."

"Okay, you're fine."

Without even being able to give a proper answer, I could only stand behind him like a doll. Hyscliff picks up the petrified Greta.

No matter the master swordsman, in order to receive an attack from above from a longsword, you have to put a blade edge horizontally in front of your face and support it with your left hand. Immediately, blood wells up there. The komusou momentarily withdraws and pretending he's seizing the opportunity, aims for Conrad's shoulder. Since he moved out of the way with so little time to spare, I'm not even sure if he's dodging it well. Most likely, only the participants can understand how well their attacks are going.

I tried to call out his name, but my voice still wasn't coming out.

But that was probably for the best. It could cost him his life to have his concentration broken.

Even though I'm five steps away, I can feel the tension between the two so clearly it hurts. They're crossing blades at a speed that an amateur can't keep up with. When Conrad somehow lost his balance and managed to hold his ground, I shamefully swayed on my feet and had to lean my body against the wall.

My entire body was shaking. No matter what I told myself, I couldn't stop shaking. My teeth wouldn't come together, my eyes were bloodshot, and I felt a cold sweat on my cheeks and back.

In just a few days, I'd had my life targeted twice, but the fear I felt now was nothing like the first time.

When that man came at me, I felt his overwhelming intent to kill and despaired.

I'm gonna die, I thought. For the first time in my life, I thought I was going to be killed. There was nothing else in my life that I could compare it to.

Some cold part of me outside of my emotions watched the swordplay as if it was happening on the other side of a glass wall. Against a brave enemy flamboyantly waving his sword around, Conrad kept his movements to the bare minimum. As he drew his sword in a calculated silver stream, I couldn't help but think it was miraculous.

Before I knew it, all the men in the room had their hands on their sword hilts. Biron's three bodyguards are all definitely targeting us. Hyscliff's subordinate moves to stand in front of him, but the former Crown Prince who is peerless only with his smile simply laughed and pushed him aside, taking a step forward.

"Yuuri!"

"... huh?"

Wolfram, his back to me, spoke to me over his shoulder in a small but strong voice. When did Greta cling to my knees?

"When it starts, look for an opening and get out. Don't worry about your ankle and just run to

the hotel. Lock the door. Don't let anyone in. Take the kid and go."

"Ah, yeah."

My voice finally came back to me.

"Just in case... unsheathe your blade."

"Blade? But, just flowers come out of this."

"Idiot, twist the grip! Why do you think that's called Windpipe No. 1? Because it's slit the windpipes of so many people!"

Okay, now I'm kind of scared to hold this thing.

With a sound like a futon being thrown out, the battle comes to an end.

"Conrad!"

The man who tried to kill me is lying face up on the floor. The description 'lump of flesh that resembles a body' is appropriate here.

"... Is he... dead?"

"No, not yet. Don't get close."

The komusou hat that was on his head was neatly cut in half. The man's face is clearly exposed. His left eye is sealed shut by inflamed skin and there are burns on his cheek and nose that have been negligently treated. He's breathing shallowly, but it seems like his breath may stop at any second. There is a vast amount of red blood gushing out from his stomach. When I think that Conrad's sword made that injury, my knees start to shake and I want to run away.

"This..."

"He's probably been tortured. Yuuri, stay back! He's still alive and he's quite skilled with magic. It's not unthinkable that he'll use the last bit of his strength to attack you!"

"I, I get it. I get it."

After that strong warning I step back. There's blood flowing from Conrad's left arm and the side of his temple.

"Conrad, your arm."

"It's fine, it hasn't been severed-"

"Hube!"

Throwing me off, Greta dashes towards the man. Before I can even tell her it's dangerous, she's on her knees and shaking the seriously injured man.

"Hube, are you going to die!? Hey, are you going to die!?"

"Greta stop, that man tried to kill... Did you say Hube!?"

Hearing this name we've heard over and over again in the recent past, both Wolfram and I are taken aback. If you're talking about Hube, that means Lord Gegenhuber Grisela. The husband of the bride Nicola who is going to give birth to the successor of the Grisela family in The Great Demon Kingdom, and through his mother, a cousin of Gwendal von Voltaire's. I've heard they look similar. This man who went missing in Svelera shouldn't be here in another country's resort town. But even so, how does he know my hidden child? As a father, that's very troubling.

"Hube is, I can't tell... if he looks like Gwen or not..."

Even if Wolfram and I peer at him, we couldn't tell what he originally looked like. Half of his face is burned.

The child takes a large coin out of her breast pocket and is trying to press it into the hand of

the dying man.

“Hey Hube, I’m giving it back. I’m giving it back so don’t die.”

“Greta, ignoring why you know Hube’s name, I think you might be mistaken.”

“No... that’s Gegenhuber,” Conrad murmurs bitterly while holding a finger to the flowing blood on his brow. His voice was a monotone as if he was just confirming for himself and not anyone else.



"I knew it as soon as we crossed swords. He is Gegenhuber. I don't know why he's here though."

"Hey wait, so you knew he was Hube and you cut him down anyway!? He's a demon, and not only that, but someone you know. You almost killed him without going easy on him at all!?"

"If I'd gone easy on him... I'd have ended up like that."

"Huh?"

Greta very patiently continued to press the coin into the casualty's hand while speaking to him.

"You know, I did what you said, but the king wasn't a woman. But since Yuuri's a really good person, he said I was his hidden child without even showing him the seal. So, I'm giving it back to you! I'm giving it back so please don't die."

"That's the insignia," Wolfram murmured, holding my elbow in place of the second brother who had to stop his bleeding.

"That's probably the insignia passed down through the Grisela family. If you had something like that, the soldiers would definitely let you pass without question."

"So, that means he really is Gegenhuber Grisela? Then why did he try to kill me?"

Did he hate me even though we never met?

"Uhahahahaa!"

The villainous merchant Luis Biron pointed at me with a laugh that if you gave a survey to a bunch of girls, 8 or 9 out of ten would rate as unpleasant.

"I don't need money or women."

"... What, then you want to just be a little taller?"

"I know what I want you to bet now. If I can win Mr. Mitsuemon, I'd gladly bet the deed to the western district."

Why me? (8**) I haven't even revealed since coming in this room that I'm the Demon King. Then why is Biron pointing at me and laughing with a collector's expression?

"Ah!"

I finally realize that my vision is clear and naturally colored and hurriedly pick up my sunglasses from the floor. It's too late since the merchant has arbitrarily decided my value.

"Two people with black eyes and black hair never appear in the same world. And it's said that if you boil their bodies and extract the essence and drink it, you'll gain perpetual youth and be cured of any illness."

Hey now, am I being treated like a Chinese herbal medicine!? If you want my leftover bathwater, I'd gladly pump it out for you any time.

"There are many people around the world who want a Twin Black! Among them are nobles who would gladly give up an island or two. They would never be able to stay quiet if I brought a rare beast like that in front of them."

"You're treating me like a rare beast!?"

"I've decided, Mr. Hyscliff! If you're willing to bet this living treasure, I'll put forward my deed. This can all be quickly-pon resolved."

Uuugh and now I'm being called a treasure. It would be cool if you want to call me the MVP of such-and-such like Ichiro, but when you say 'treasure' in a hot spring town, the only thing I think of is an adult treasure house. (9)

Even after looking at my black eyes, Mr. Shiny didn't seem tempted by the villainous merchant's offer.

"To be strung along by some baseless folklore and look at such a splendid person as a prize to be won in a bet! You are a shameless person, Luis Biron!"

"I see."

Biron abruptly stood and moved around the table, walking toward us. That fidgety walk makes him seem even more like Kinpachi.

"And even after I proposed from my side, it seems you're not prepared to accept. In that case, I'll completely-pon forget everything that happened here and pretend we never had this meeting. But still, this man, who suddenly showed up and said he wanted work and I hired as a bodyguard, far from protecting me has went and done something completely unnecessary."

He kicked the motionless Gegenhuber in the head with his shiny leather shoes. Greta gives a little shout and raises her head. Even I unconsciously raise my voice.

"Stop it!"

Evil Kinpachi narrows his eyes.

"Oh, so you're protecting him. It seems you know him. Mr. Hyscliff has some interesting friends if one of their acquaintances tried to kill them. Hey you, get rid of this unpleasant sight."

"Hah!"

"Hah!"

"Ho!"

With superb responses that sounded like they were about to go cut down some trees, the three bodyguards lifted up Hube's body. His exhausted body is dragged limply across the floor.

"... Wait."

Without listening to my words, they're about to throw him out the door.

"I said wait, didn't I!? Don't carry him around like that! He's still a living human! Well no, he might not be a human, but he's not a futon or a clay pipe or anything you know!?"

Greta is banging on my thigh begging me to make them stop. There is no father who can remain composed when their young daughter is brought to tears. Even if that wasn't the case, Gegenhuber is the husband of Nicola that we needed to find.

"And anyway you treat your employees too horribly! And you have the nerve to have that third year, class B hair cut, Biron or Melon or whatever your name is. If I was stuck in class B for three years, I'd switch homerooms without pity! Forget that, locking Izura and Nina in a stuffed animal room and hitting them and letting them catch colds is pathetic. That's clear mistreatment. Are you properly thinking of their paid vacations or work-related injuries or insurance!? If you can't think of welfare programs then you should quit being an entrepreneur!"

"No Mr. Mitsuemmon, making young girls into prostitutes is the more pressing ethical problem rather than a lack of welfare programs..." Mr. Shiny sharply points out to me as I stupidly ramble.

"Ah that's right! The rights agreements on the children. UNICEF won't just stand by while you do such inhumane things! Actually, is there not a UNICEF in this world?"

Conrad places a hand on my left shoulder to calm me down. Biron raises his chin in a sneer and picks up the lobster he had thrown aside. Why a lobster..?

"I've said this before, but I own the right to do business here. *I'm* doing business with *my* money. Making children work is wrong? Their parents took the deposit and have already used

it.”

In these 16 years I’ve lived, I’ve suffered my fair share of losses. They’ve all been due to my short temper. Even quitting baseball which had been a large part of my life was due to me losing my temper and punching the coach. A short temper is a weakness so I’ve never profited in any way from being so volatile.

However, my bad habit has dragged my middle class sense of justice from deep within me right up to my throat.

“I thooorougly understand. If there’s no UNICEF in this world and there’s no Tetsuko Kuroyanagi in Hildyard, then I’ll be Tetsuko! I’ll invite her to this very room!” (10)

My companions next to and behind me sigh as if they were thinking it would turn out like this. While my face is mad, but I’m apologetic inside, I point at Biron with his parted, Kinpachi hair.

“Luis Biron! I accept your gamble with the deed and I as wager! However, your opponent isn’t Hyscliff! You’re challenging Yuuri Shibuya of The Great Demon Kingdom!”

Slightly panicked, Mr. Shiny asks ‘Mr. Mitsuemon?’ with the end raising an octave. Kind of like he’s wondering ‘what is this demon saying?’

After a few moments, Biron laughs impressively and then suddenly stops.

“How amusing! You’re putting your own self down as a wager? Fine, the world famous Luis Biron accepts your challenge. Now then, you should prepare yourselves. There’s a once in a decade event coming up! We shall bet on the Rare Beast Race!”

Rare Beast Race!?

Everyone present exclaims the same thing.

(1) Honestly, I didn’t know if I needed to footnote this, but I’m not sure how popular this movie is abroad (and it’s kind of an old movie too XD). He’s talking about the little furry creature from the movie Gremlins.

(2) Reference to Sannen B-gumi Kinpachi Sensei (Teacher Kinpachi from Year 3 Class B), a *super* long-running television show in Japan (1979-2011) about a teacher named Kinpachi Sakamoto and his experiences teaching in middle school. The show dealt with social issues in Japan in the context of a middle school environment like bullying, suicide, teenage pregnancy etc. Here’s a pic from the time period Yuuri’s thinking about (

[\[Pic here\]](#)

)

(3) Doraemon is a kid’s manga/show about a robot cat from the future of the same name. As implied in this sentence, Doraemon is written with the ‘dora’ in katakana and the ‘emon’ in hiragana. Hiragana and katakana being the two phonetic writing systems in Japanese. It’s very unusual to mix those two together in the same word.

(4) Komusou were Zen Buddhist monks who wore straw baskets on their heads as a way to convey that they had no ego. Komusou actually means something along the lines of ‘monk of nothingness.’ They meditated by playing a shakuhachi, which is a bamboo flute, and they would wander around on pilgrimages with the baskets on their heads playing music. Because they were such a common sight and were given (the extremely rare) free rein to wander as they

wished, samurai and ninja would disguise themselves as komusou for various reasons.

(5) Baseball reference! Are you surprised? XD 'Ichiro from Taiwan' was the nickname for Luis Manuel de los Santos Martinez (or just Luis Santos in Japan) who used to be in the Yomiuri Giants. He was called that because he was playing for a team in Taiwan before he got recruited into the Giants.

(6) This is a Doraemon joke. The Doraemon theme song has a line that goes 'Doraemon, Doraemon, honwaka-pappa, honwaka-pappa, doraemon.' It's a made up word. One theory is that it's a compilation of 'honwaka' (comfy) and 'pappato' (quickly).

(7) Jokes again! Okay, so the Japanese version is dirtier XD Anyway, Yuuri says 'mata no na wo Yuuri' (my other name is Yuuri) and then Wolfram asks 'Omae wa mata ni namae ga aru no ka?' (your crotch has a name?). The joke here being that 'mata' can mean 'other/another/again' or 'crotch' depending on how it's written/used.

(8) I had to take out two sentences here because there was a joke that I just couldn't translate or think of a corresponding English one. Yuuri says 'Nande, ore o?' (Why me?). And then because the 'me' here is 'ore o' in Japanese, he starts talking about oreo cookies. SO, the translation of that paragraph actually goes as follows:

"Why me? If you're talking about oreos, they're a major snack with a pleasing contrast of black and white that you can enjoy three times with just one cookie. But even so, while this may be offensive to the inventor of oreos, they shouldn't be put on the same level as the deed to a business district. I haven't even revealed since coming in this room that I'm the Demon King..."

(9) Yuuri is referring to the Atami Treasure House (Atami Hihoukan). Umm, it's a museum that is kind of like a Ripley's Believe it or Not but with weird sex stuff.

(10) Tetsuko Kuroyanagi is a Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF. She was the first person from Asia to be made a Goodwill Ambassador and is super famous for her charity work.

Chapter 7

Your Majesty, right now I am at a place as cold as the northern lands testing my piety... I'm on my way to begin my morning prayers, but several hours ago, I just got done with the day-change dance- I mean, prayer...

His words becoming 'The Story of the Great Demon Kingdom, From the Northern Country' without him realizing it, Günter von Christ climbs the long, dark staircase step by step to the overlooking, rooftop prayer area.

"How are the bodies of the people here holding up? Do they not require sleep? How was it, Dacascos? You didn't sleep at all, did you?"

"Weelll thaz I did farrt inthe niigh a little."

"What!? Did you say you farted!? And without even think of my feelings, trapped in the same room with you!?"

Dacascos stops yawning.

"... I didn't fart. But Your Excellency, if you're going to freak out about something like that, you'll never be able to get married."

"That's *fine*... I will pledge... my love and loyalty... solely to His Majesty."

His breathing is quickly speeding up.

But in any case, Lord von Christ still hasn't given up trying to gain His Majesty's favor?

Dacascos lets out a sigh, careful not to attract his attention.

The soldiers have a private hobby: His Majesty's Special Occurrence Forecast (abbreviated 'His Majesty's Spec-Oc'). Currently, most of the wagers are on 'Wolfram forcibly having his way with him,' but the payoff is low. There are various other predictions like 'He'll fall for Her Prior Majesty Cecilie's charms' and 'He'll run away with a life-sized, stuffed beauty knitted by His Excellency Gwendal after having their love accepted by society.'

He has some friends who are natural born gamblers who saw the 'He'll get a super younger girl and prepa... raise her according to his ideal' and bet on that dark horse with a huge payback even while they were crying and hoping it would not come true. But at this rate, he can no longer say that 'His Excellency Günter, losing his mind, emits a strange voice, kidnaps His Majesty and runs around madly' is an unlikely scenario. That would get a huge payoff. He'd be able to pay all his house payments at once. His wife would fall in love with him all over again. Alright, Your Excellency Günter, I'll buy it!

Dacascos writes that down on his mental notepad.

"These stairs... are seriously long... aren't they?"

"They make good training, though."

Compared to the new soldier's rite of passage, Bunny-hopping up the Five Thousand Stairs of Hell, this climb is nothing. You have to bunny-hop down the stairs too, so every year there are soldiers who are seriously injured after falling down from the top and soldiers who sink down and hug their knees with empty eyes around midway and bunches of soldiers who drop out. Although, there are some among the soldiers who managed to finish who have miraculously had their urinary tract stones pass.

Because Günter was going so slow, many of the monks passed them by. As a rule, all talk

is forbidden outside of their personal rooms so no one called out to them, but for some reason, they all turn at them with a smile as if they want to say something.

Around when Günter was about to explode because he wanted to know why, a resolute young monk came up next to him. In order to not be noticed by those around them, in a small voice he left a short message:

“The diary was amazing.”

Huh?

After that, the monks around them all started to murmur ‘I thought so too, I thought so too.’

“I was moved.”

“I cried.”

“Is there any more?”

“Are you going to write a continuation?”

“Diaries are really amazing, huh?”

After being bashfully handed a sketchbook with a ‘I tried making a few illustrations to go along with it,’ Günter finally stops walking.

“... Huh!?”

It was a monastery with few diversions.

* * * * *

According to The Hot Springs Doctor (which is a fake-sounding name) who claimed to have never seen demon injuries before, even though they gave him pain suppressants and infection suppressants and all kinds of suppressants and he’s probably not in too much pain at the moment, there’s no guarantee that he’ll survive.

“Right now, he’s on the bank.”

“Don’t you mean ‘the brink?’”(1)

After my impulsive and flashy declaration of ‘I challenge you!’, we put the near-dead Gegenhuber on a stretcher and left in a fairly plain fashion with a ‘Well, let’s call it a night.’ It took a while to get back to the hotel and it’ll probably be dawn soon.

After placing the just barely breathing man on Conrad’s bed, Greta hasn’t left his side. I was burning with jealousy. Fathers are childish at times like these.

“Your Majesty, don’t get close. If possible, stay with Wolf in the next room.”

“Why? He doesn’t have the strength to hold a sword anymore. Even I’m not afraid of getting assassinated by someone so gravely injured.”

“No, you can’t let your guard down. It’s gotten to the point where I want to record your wimpiness in the Airhead Book of World Records or something,” Wolf said as he leaned his head against the wall, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. Is he praising me?

“But I just don’t get it. Why did Gegenhuber target you? Disregarding the ill will between him and Conrad, he wasn’t against the royal authority.”

“Hube can’t have known that Yuuri was the Demon King.”

“Ah, I see.”

Greta had definitely said so, that the king wasn’t a woman. Which means, when they met each other before she came to Blood Pledge Castle, it’s possible that he told her that the ruler of

the Great Demon Kingdom was Lady Celi and if she told them she was her hidden child, it would be easy to gain access. Sadly, that information is half a year old and he didn't give her the current version.

Greta targeted me in order to gain favor with the royalty in Svelera under which whose care she had been placed. Then why did he come after me with a sword? Of course, he wouldn't know that I'm on good terms with Nicola and that his girlfriend is going to give birth in his home. If he did, it would be ungrateful. I don't think he owes me anything, though.

I sit backwards in the chair, chin resting on the seatback, and gaze at the bed. From far away.

Conrad speaks in a low, emotionless voice.

"... He probably wanted to make me serious."

"Serious? Ah, regardless of whether I'm the king or not, he figured you would get mad if he attacked your friend. Well from an outsider's perspective, I'm more like your lazy son."

"Not so. He saw through it immediately."

I almost asked 'through what?,' but I stopped as I was unlikely to get an answer.

Gripping the heavily injured man's hand, Greta starts murmuring as if to herself.

"... Hube wanted to die..."

"Greta?"

"... Hube told me, in the past, he did something very bad. Something so horrible, it was inexcusable for him to live. But because he had been given a job, he managed to keep going without thinking about it. Eventually he started to forget the past and started to think that it might be okay for him to live and he even found someone he liked. But..."

He met Nicola, fell in love, and was instantly torn from his past life. Because, they were a demon and a human.

"As he sat in the dungeon and a long time passed, he said he understood that he hadn't been forgiven for what happened in the past. But when he tried to take his own life, a woman appeared in his dreams. She said, 'You can't die. You can't die yet.' So he couldn't kill himself and was waiting for someone to kill him. That's why we left the castle together. Because, I knew all the shortcuts and secret passageways even better than the soldiers."

This must be about the mistake he made in the past and the reason between the ill will between him and Conrad. I sneak a glance wondering what sort of face he was making while listening to this, but he had an even more charming look than usual and there was no trace of anger or resentment.

"... We were together part of the way... then we split up and I went to Yuuri's and Hube went somewhere else besides the Great Demon Kingdom in order to find strong people."

"So he became a bodyguard in order to be killed by someone stronger than him..."

I'm fairly sure that that woman or whoever who popped up in his dreams didn't tell him that he would meet his destined opponent if he took up the sword.

"Yuuri."

"Hm?"

I give an idiotic answer to Greta's soft call.

"Hube keeps getting colder... his temperature keeps falling!"

"Eh!? That's bad, we should call the doctor back, the doctor!"

“You healed my fever, right!? You made Nina’s cold better, right!? Heal Hube like that, heal Hube’s wounds!”

“That was, um, well I don’t know if what I did really had any effect...”

The words of the health care provider come to mind.

‘With Your Majesty’s immense power, this level of technique would be simple.’

Gisela, is that true? Have I progressed to the point where I am able to use Cure and Heal?

“Yuuri, help. Hold his hand.”

“Well, I guess I can try.”

I move to stand up, but I’m pushed straight back down on the chair with Conrad’s large hands on both of my shoulders. I’m held down by his strong palms and even if I put strength into my knees, I can’t move.

“No.”

“Don’t say something so heartless, Kaku-”

“Even if you call me by my fake name, the answer is still no. I said it before. He’s pointed a sword at you and it’s not unthinkable that he’ll try to again. You can’t get close to someone like that. I know Gegenhuber’s abilities the best.”

“But, but even so! He’s Nicola’s husband and the father of a child about to be born, right!? The one I have to help isn’t just him; Nicola waiting in the kingdom will be hurt too. And even if you guys are in different leagues now, wasn’t he on your team before? You’re not so a cold man as to stand by silently and watch an ex-teammate die, are you!?”



Conrad's eyes above me suddenly cloud over and darken. The little flecks of silver change their appearance to shine coldly.

"I *am* that sort of man."

"Conrad."

"If it's going to endanger you, I'll abandon Hube. I am that sort of man."

The charming, attractive, young, real-life nice guy Conrad. The man of which everything about is perfect, except for his bad jokes, Lord Conrart Weller. If a timid person was met with this sort of expression from him, they'd be unable to defy him.

"... If I wasn't the king... you wouldn't have stopped me."

"Not at all. If you weren't His Majesty the Demon King, I wouldn't have made these irritating explanations and I'd have simply carried you from the room."

"How long're ya two gonna go on widdall that complicated talk?"

Half asleep with his eyes half open, Wolfram bites back an indiscreet yawn.

"Ya'anna heal Gegenhuber with healin' magic, righ?"

"You're not speaking properly."

"Why 'on't you ask me?"

My powers of comprehension can't keep up with this unexpected utterance

"Because Wolf... did you have that kind of skill?"

"I'm not as skilled as Gisela, but I do have some experience with raising people's natural healing. There's no way I can't perform a technique that even the likes of you can do. Because you're a-

"Wimp."

The Pretty Boy gives a satisfied snort and repeats 'are you asking me?' I do so without a second's hesitation. I don't care if he calls me a wimp.

"Alright Yuuri, watch closely. This is how you use the healing arts. Hey Gegenhuber!"

Rather than hold his hand, he grabs his wrist, roughly shakes it around and yells at him.

"You listening, you injured guy!? I don't want to help you, but I am because Yuuri said 'please!' If you live any longer, thank him! Promise you'll devote your loyalty to him for the rest of your life! You've got some serious nerve getting seriously injured and making me treat you. I don't care if you die, but that woman and Yuuri will grieve."

After that, he kept piling on the vilification and he even took on the audience's animosity.

"... Well, he *is* drawing out his will to live, but..."

"This is a unique situation, so please don't remember and imitate this."

Because the injured man's condition stabilized I laid down with the thought I'd catch some sleep, but I'm woken up moments later. According to my brave digital analog G-shock, it was a little past 4:30.

"If we don't start making our way to the meeting place, we won't be on time for our noon appointment."

Conrad was digging through a suitcase.

"It'll be effective, so wear this."

He spreads out my black, school uniform type outfit. Besides making an appeal as a stupid public high school student, how is this going to be effective?

"If a Twin Black wearing black is calmly watching from the VIP seats, I think the spectators

will look up with a sense of fear.”

“Won’t they just say ‘that’s bad luck’ and cross their fingers? What I’m more worried about is the arrangements for our rare beast. I mean, it’s a rare beast race, right? If we don’t have an animal to enter, there’s no point. We can’t say ‘please choose for me’ or something like some line from a drama. If I end up running myself, I won’t get that far because my position is catcher.”

“As for that, please be at ease. I’ve supplied us with a fast, charming one that ranks above an 80% on the rare beast scale.”

As I put on my new shoes, I remember that we came here to heal my ankle, not for some huge gamble or to save anyone. It surprisingly hasn’t even been one day since we came to Hildyard’s resort town.

In the next bed, Wolfram mumbles cutely, “I can’t eat anymore.”

Lord Weller calls for room service and hands me a light meal on a tray.

“You have to eat at least a little. You might not have an appetite from the stress, however.”

“Stress? Stress, huh. That’s right; it’d be weird to not be stressed.”

In the heat of the moment, I had put my own body forth as a wager in a bet. If I win, I gain the business rights to the western district and Izura and Nina will be set free and it’ll all be a huge celebration. But on the off-chance that I lose, my body will come into possession of the low-life Luis Biron and I have no idea where he’ll take me. If things go bad, I might be stuffed like his other rare beasts and displayed in some millionaire’s living room. I wonder what they’d do with my underwear? Maybe they’ll be unnecessary with my beautiful, trained body.

“I’ll say this in advance, but if some unforeseen accident happens and by some chance we lose...”

The always meticulously prepared Conrad has, as predicted, already devised a plan for the version of events that ends in defeat.

“... I’ll do something cowardly. If that happens, please don’t hate or speak ill of me.”

“Something cowardly? Like what?”

“I’ll pick up Your Majesty and run away on my bare feet.”

“Why on your bare feet? Are you going to leave your wallet behind too?”

I ended up laughing a bit. I guess speed is important either way.

At this once in a decade event, Hildyard’s Pleasure Capitol’s Rare Beast Race, the little town of tents was quickly closed down and arranged into a special track exhibition.

Maybe Luis Biron’s underlings worked really hard, but a facility like a racetrack appeared overnight. Spectators are already taking their seats on the grass outside of the fencing.

“So what exactly is going to run the race? We can’t use normal horses, right?”

“Now now, they’re waiting at the paddock.”

Just by walking around in my school uniform, the humans around me clear the way.

In an open lot in front of us, there is an animal going around in small circles.

It’s moving gracefully on four feet and is taking heavy steps. At its side is a petite man who is busy petting and posing it. It’s got a beige and brown two tone color pattern. At first glance, one of Earth’s endangered species.

“Gyeh!”

Wolfram lets loose a sound like a frog. The color of his face is changing before my eyes.

“No-no way are you thinking of entrusting Yuuri’s life to that impudent creature, jari!?” (2)

“Hey Wolf, you’re relapsing into using jari again.”

“Sh-shut up, jari! I’m not saying ‘jari jari,’ jari!”

Lumbering around on the short, winter grass was a sand bear that looked just like a giant panda. The petite man who was animal trainer and rider sees us and waves with both hands.

“Your Majesty! Your Majesty!”

His narrow eyes are such gentle grey, I want to properly check if he can see. It’s been around four months since his fateful encounter on the sand dune. Just like he said on that day, Ryan and the sand bear have become famous in the resort town.

“Your Majesty, let me introduce you to Keiji. Hey Keiji, it seems His Majesty the Demon King has graciously come to see you run.”

“... Actually, since he’s usually in a cage in the circus, is he really a fast runner?”

“Oh he’s extremely fast. He’s been living in a sand dune his whole life, so he’s developed a lot of lower body strength in order to run through the sand.”

Well, a fast panda can qualify as a rare beast.

The sand bear, which looks about five times heavier than Ryan, is leaning its entire body on him. It’s playfully rubbing him with a clawed paw that looks like it can gouge a heart out.

“Wahaha, Keiji is such a sweetie! Oh, my little honey~!”

‘Is it really playing with you and not just trying to dissect its prey?’ is what I want to ask, but I hold my tongue. There is obviously a trust between this rare beast and animal trainer that we ordinary people can’t understand.

When the spectator space got pretty crowded, something like a fanfare is loudly played from brass instruments. In the VIP section that looked like a watchtower, there is just enough room for five people and we all sit together with our knees and thighs pressed together. Mr. Biron is relaxing comfortably in the adjacent watchtower with just one other person.

When the participating animals are announced, the racetrack was filled with the sound of the spectator’s stomping.

“On the Red Course! From The O’Sullivan’s Circus and The World’s Dangerous Animals, Non-Member 167, the sand bear Keiji---!”

There were exclamations of ‘Oh, a sand bear!’ ‘They eat humans in the desert!’ ‘I get to see a sand bear run!’ ‘Sand bears are so cute!’ etc. etc.

“You know, this doesn’t really sound like the announcements for a race... but anyway, what does Outsider 167 mean? What’s ‘Outsider’ supposed to signify?”

“On the Blue Course! Owned by The World Famous Luis Biron, Outsider 201, the Hell’s Paradise Goala----!”

Excited voices were raised saying ‘Whoa! A Hell’s Paradise Goala!?’ ‘The Hell’s Paradise Goala that’s said to kya! turn into a monster if it’s not dangling and whose staple food is yucca leaves!’ ‘I’m gonna see something awesome!’ etc. etc.

“Its staple food isn’t yucca leaves, but eucalyptus, isn’t it? But anyway, what kind of animal is a goala? And ‘Hell’s Paradise’ sounds like some kind of Buddhist phrase...” (3)

But what appeared on the turf was a completely ordinary koala. Of course, it was huge; the same size or bigger than the sand bear Keiji. It was carried out together with a thick trunk, but it was holding on to a branch and had its eyes closed as it dangled there happily.

“What’s so ‘Hell’s Paradise’ about that thing?”

“It’ll be fun if you watch closely. It’s a so-called ‘Jekyll and Hyde.’”

It’s one lap around the race track and the goal is in front of this seat. Ryan was riding on the sand bear Keiji’s back, but on the goala’s side there were only three men with axes standing around the trunk. I wonder if they’re last night’s ‘Hah! Hah! Ho!’ guys.

The starter raises his right hand high and as soon as he waves it down, the axes start swinging. The thick trunk makes dull noises and sways and the goala falls from the branch. As soon as it falls, the animal’s expression changes. Its opened eyes are bloodshot and completely red and it seems like veins are about to pop up on its brown nose. When it opens its mouth, it bares its large teeth and lets loose something more akin to a war cry than a roar.

“GOAA-!”

“It-it’s scary!”

Once it lays eyes on the sand bear Keiji, who made a smooth start to the race, it takes off after it with a hunter’s run. I see, so it doesn’t need a rider. Does it have a rule that no one (or thing?) is allowed to run in front of it?

“I wonder if Ryan and Keiji are going to be alright. It looks like they’ll be devoured if that thing catches up to them.”

“Probably, Hell’s Paradise Goalas are carnivorous.”

This is dangerous, Detective Sandbear! Will your backup from the police department arrive in time!? (4)

Just like the animal trainer boasted, the rare beasts were as fast as horses. Their front and back legs were moving so fast, my visual abilities weren’t able to keep up with the movement.

“Last night, I went to give Ryan his severance pay.”

“Ah, so you went to a guy’s place, not a girl’s.”

“.... The scene I saw there, it was really not of this world. I mean, Ryan and the sand bear were living together.”

What’s more unbelievable, that or the rooms of girls who don’t know how to clean?

Whether because it was born to run or it’s just hungry, the goala is clearly closing the gap from its starting time. The swaying white streaks coming out of its mouth weren’t strings or threads, but drool. Even its heavy breathing was closing in on them.

“It’s gonna catch up! It’s gonna catch up! And they’re already on the third corner! Was it really that bad that the course wasn’t sand!?”

“If it was sand, he would roll around, dig a hole, climb down, make a home, set a trap and this wouldn’t be a race at all. It doesn’t need to be sand. Anyway, it was good for us that they made this special track in this open space here. Look there. Right before the goal, there’s a huge tree that looks very old, right?”

“Yeah, that well-formed tree.”

“That is the key.”

Mr. Shiny is switching back and forth between completely over the top joy and dejection. Next to me, Conrad is smiling calmly and poking the tired looking Wolfram every once in a while.

Turning the last corner, the two animals start charging straight to the finish. The goala’s sharp fangs are in a position that makes it look like it’s going to bite the sand bear’s short, upright tail at any moment.

“Ah, Keiji, look out! Ryan! Ryan!”

I don't know if there's an applicable word for this, but a cloud of grass pulls a curtain over our field of vision and around where they'll pass the huge tree in question, the spectators lose sight of the race. And! Only the sand bear Keiji crosses the finish line in front of us.

"Eh!?"

Ryan wraps his arms around the neck of his beloved bear and after a hug, strikes a triumphant pose from his hunched over position.

There's a huge roar of delight from the crowd and a bunch of losing betting stubs fluttering about in the air. Hey wait, since when did this race become a public bet?

"... What? What, what, why did only Keiji... where did the goala disappear to?"

When I look up like Conrad indicates, I see the Hell's Paradise Goala hanging from a prominent branch sticking out of the huge tree before the finish line.

It's clinging to the yellow, knobby limb and its eyes are closed in rapture. It seems to be completely in paradise mode.

"Goalas are ferocious carnivores, but it can't resist hanging on a branch that it likes. No matter what the situation, if it's faced with its favorite tree, it loses control of itself."

As the grey beast dreamily clings to the tree, if you don't pay attention to the perspective, it was as cute as Australia's symbol. If you didn't see the sudden transformation into a Violence Goala, it might even be able to become a mascot character.

But no matter how cute it was, it clearly had a pattern of giving up. Because it abandoned the match, Keiji and Ryan's victory was decided and my body became my own again.

"I can't accept this!"

Luis Biron stands with an enraged expression in the neighboring watchtower two meters away. That anger was misplaced, but his clenched fist was shaking.

"I absolutely cannot accept this! Because it was interrupted by an accident, this race is invalid! I request a rematch!"

"You must be joking. It wasn't an accident or anything. Your chosen participant just retired. Isn't the reason for the loss because of the fact that the owner entered his horse in the race without knowing his horse's personality or how the horse would deal with the location? Complaining with 'it's invalid' or 'I want a rematch' is pathetic."

"I won't accept it, that a Hell's Paradise Goala would lose to a sand bear... someone! Get another mount! This was an invalid race, invalid. We're racing all over again."

His Kinpachi-style, one length hair is getting in his mouth in bunches. His upturned eyebrows have been upgraded to the Mount Fuji version and he's hitting his subordinate beside him.

"Get another one! Ah, a labakap! Bring a labakap!!

"Are you kidding me!? The one who decides whether a match is forfeit is the referee, not the players! And anyway, what's that weird creature that sounds like Robocop that's not a llama or a horse or even a kappa!?" (5)

Hyscliff lightly gets to his feet and holds out the signed document he got last night.

"You don't know when to give up, Luis Biron. You have agreed to the terms as such. Any more resistance will just hurt your reputation. You need to carefully consider between ill-repute and fame, however... ah."

That surprised me. A black goat tore the document from him and started eating it without even reading it.

This isn't the time to sit around and write a response. Looking for something to swap out with the balled up paper in its mouth, I dig in my pocket and pull out a wrinkled object. What was this again? Opening it, I see the inside is money and the outside is white.

"... Fake money? Right, that's right it's fake money! Hey Brand Bag, no, Luis Biron! Even if you try to hide the evidence like that, you can't hide your villainous deeds! You made a huge deposit of illegal fake money under the two-horned thing in the adjoining tent, didn't you? Here, I have two of the bills. With only the top face printed and the back a pure white, it's obviously counterfeit."

I wave around the thin paper.

"Your Majesty..."

"Hm? What, Conrad? Why are you using such an apologetic tone of voice?"

"I'm sorry for only giving you small change... this is difficult to say, but... well, Hildyard's paper money is..."

He nervously hands me a bill so crisp and new you can only find it in a bank envelope.

"Geh!"

"... normally only printed on one side."

The back is pure white. My brain goes white too.

"Hmph! What does a young foreign brat know about anything? I will not tolerate these extremely rude accusations!"

At Biron's yell, Hyscliff raises his eyebrows in indignation and, with his fingers on the hilt of his sword, says:

"But the problem isn't Hildyard's money, but the money of my home country of Cavalcade!" Kinpachi Biron's face color changes.

"Of course, the drachma bills of my mother country are not printed on only one side! Now, Mr. Luis Biron, what kind of story are you going to tell me now?" (6)

Mr. Shiny's head shone brightly in the sun as he moved forward steadily.

"Even if you bribe the Hildyard officials, you won't be able to escape an investigation by Cavalcade. Now, Biron, resign yourself and give up the deed, be ashamed of your actions and confine yourself to your home."

"... You want the business rights to this land that much?"

Everyone including me readied themselves wondering what he's going to say this late in the game. Only Greta looks around and her nostrils twitch like a small animal.

Luis Biron lets loose a laugh filled with madness and brushes the strands of hair out of his mouth.

"Then I'll give it to you as you wish. Losing one or two backwater resort areas like this doesn't bother me at all! Just as written, I'll gladly let you start up a hypocritically clean business in the brand new western district. I, Luis Biron, as the one who is leaving, will promptly clear out my business so as to not leave a mess for you."

Now it's not just Greta, but my nose is also twitching. Judging by this scorched smell, is someone illegally burning garbage somewhere?

"On the pleasure quarter purified by flames, you can even build a church or temple!"

"Yuuri, over there!"

Hearing a high, hysteric laugh behind me, I turn my attention to where Greta points. Smoke

and flames are rising from the wooden buildings surrounding the plaza.

"You set it on fire!?"

The spectators who came to the special race track start scrambling over each other to escape in the other direction. Pressed with the weight of the flow of people, the watchtower shakes and we can't even get down to the ground.

"Damn you, Luis Biron! This is cowardly!"

"The fire truck, where's the fire truck!? Where are the firefighters!? And... uwa!"

Two closed windows suddenly explode and flames come blowing out. The back draft that blew away Kurt Russell is right in front of my eyes.

In the blink of an eye, the blaze consumed the building and started to spread to the neighboring shops and surrounding grass. Finally, firefighter-like men came running, pulling along a handcart with a pump. However, the flames are so vigorous I don't even know if they can be contained anymore and they're licking at numerous wooden buildings.

"Actually... why aren't the girls evacuating?"

The ones who have escaped out into the street, running for their lives, are all male employees and I can't see any of the many girls working there.

"In order for them to properly-pon work at night, I give them lots of thorough-pon rest. My working conditions are fair. At this time, they're all soundly-pon sleeping. In order to create a safe environment for them to rest in, I prevent any outsiders from getting in and lock the door. I wanted them treated well, you see."

"Then... they can't get out..."

Hyscliff's subordinates cut through the crowd and move to help the firefighters.

"Luis Biron, you, this is despicable."

"Please stop, Mr. Hyscliff, that's disgraceful. This is just an unfortunate accident. An unfortunate accident that my insurance will pay out on."

"Your Majesty, and Greta, too. You shouldn't watch..."

A window facing this way is removed and one girl leans out. Wondering if it's Izura or Nina, I gaze intently while the smoke hurts my eyes, but the girl with the long, pale blonde hair is a face I don't know. Seeing the long distance between the third floor and the ground, the girl hesitates and leans back inside. She'd be able to escape the heat if she jumped, but who knows how badly she'll be hurt from falling from that distance.

"Your Majesty?"

I can't stop staring at the girl. Without knowing it, I start screaming in my mind 'don't jump!' Don't jump, just wait a little. Someone will definitely come help you.

And who is 'someone?'

"... Who is... someone... Just who would, faced with this..."

With flames licking at her back, the girl puts her feet on the windowsill. When she lifts her head, our gazes meet for just a moment.

"Stop!"

I get the feeling she laughed.

"... why..."

I simply gaze at the now unoccupied window without the courage or preparedness to see what happened. The room was lit up with an orange glow, rather, it was filled with a

divine-seeming light.

My thought processes go blank with my rage, despair and helplessness.

The afterimage of the body that fell straight to the ground is projected on the other side of the smoke.

How did this happen?

The magic stone at my chest is burning hot and even the air in front of my face is swaying. Somewhere from inside my skull, a small electric current runs through my synapses. The shock creeping up my spine is made all the more intense in a natural, pulsating rhythm. I'm assaulted by a heavy, low tone and a high ringing in my ears of an unbearable intensity.

"Just a little... they're children..."

The orange spread of the fire and the grey of the smoke, the flash that erased all that turns my vision pure white.

Like my adrenaline and dopamine have mixed together, energy and a sense of ecstasy spreads through my entire body.

Becoming a memory out of the folds of my soul and making an appearance, the person who protected me smiles in the form of light.

Do it.

Go on.

That's impossible. I can't do something like distorting the world by myself.

Then what do you want to do?

Whose power do you want to borrow?

"No."

I want to move with my own power. I want my own power.

Prayers come true when one strongly and firmly makes a vow and overcomes their fear and desire to give up.

You become who you want to be when you wish to be so from the bottom of your heart and you have faith and put forth the effort.

- (1) This was a mini-pun with 'tode' (an embankment), and 'touge' (the difficult part). 'Touge' can also mean 'mountain pass' so it's also a pun that way (in that 'tode' and 'touge' are both land features).
- (2) Jari is a childish thing to tack on the end of sentences. Wolfram has done this before in Svelera.
- (3) This was another pun. In the Japanese, the spectator said '...shushoku wa yuukai...' (the staple food is abduction) and Yuuri's like 'shushoku wa yuukai janakute, yuukari nan janai ka na' (its staple food isn't abduction, but eucalyptus, isn't it?). The pun here being 'yuukai/yuukari' (abduction/eucalyptus). Honestly, I'm not sure how you eat abduction o.O; That might be part of the joke, though.
- (4) Another pun! The joke here is that 'keiji' can mean detective if you write it with the correct characters
- (5) Ah, puns and stuff! I actually only changed donkey to llama here (donkey in Japanese being 'roba'). The rest of the joke actually fit kinda well. A kappa is a water monster. The most popular version being a turtle creature with a little bowl-like spot on the top of their head that needs to stay filled with water or they lose all their power. They're said to do stuff ranging from little pranks to straight up drowning people in the river.
- (6) Takabayashi-sensei specifically says 'drachma' here. To be honest, when I first read this book I didn't know what it was and, thinking it was some made up animal that was printed on the money, I just skipped past it (in Japanese it's written 'dorakuma' so I immediately thought 'tiger-bear?'). But! I ran it through the dictionary just in case and came up with 'drachma' and I was like, okay, that doesn't sound like an animal... It turns out it's a type of Greek money!
-->[Yay Wikipedia!](#) I'm learning stuff!

Chapter 8

'I want to fly freely through the sky' is the dream that people imagine all creatures besides birds have. Considering the body composition of a human, realizing that dream is next to impossible. However.

"... He's flying."

To put it precisely, he's floating.

Even though he hasn't received any training or anything, Yuuri's body is floating in a standing posture as he looks down cynically with his arms folded. As if he were sliding through the air, he assumes a position between the two watchtowers.

Since it's his second time, Hyscliff doesn't get worked up after getting glared at by shining, fiery, black eyes, but Luis Biron loses the ability to speak. Even his favorite '-pon' won't come out.

The people running around trying to escape on the ground stop and point up at Yuuri. With faces filled with both fear and excitement, they all chatter on how it's a rare beast.

"... You wear the mask of one who provides daily bread, yet the truth is that you would turn young girls who haven't even lived into your own sustenance by exploiting and violating them..."

A sonorous and well traveling voice and a line worthy of an actor at the Kyoto Uzumasa Film Set. Without a doubt, this is the Super Demon King Mode. Even if you compare him to all the Demon Kings in history, he surpasses all of them with this splendid figure. Conrad, full of pride, praises Yuuri in his mind. (1)

"... In the end, if wickedness is exposed, I will turn upon it and light a fire to return it all to ash. To believe that you'd take your companions down with you and only you would survive..."

Like a slow pulse as if a giant was stretching out underground, they're assailed by a five second long tremor that travels up their backs. In the beginning it was a far away and weak shaking, but now it's nearing the surface.

"Crossing over to a foreign country where you should help stave off the starvation of the mothers, fathers and siblings, you lack filial piety and instead commit inhumane acts. You may be able to fool those ignorant people who flock around money, but you will not be able to deceive my eyes!"

The spectators were unable to take their eyes off him, but only the firefighters were devoted to their work. No matter what's happening on stage, the only thing in their heads is putting out the fire. It's the spirit of men fired up with enthusiasm. But, there aren't enough hands and the water resupply won't get there in time.

After briefly glancing in that direction, he glares at the frozen man.

"You beast in a person's skin. No, even beasts have rules and ethics. You fiend who doesn't even have that much has no right to live! Make peace with your last moments as there will be no one to collect your corpse!"

Dramatically swinging down his right arm that had been pointing at the sky, his index finger directly targets Biron. The evil merchant with the upturned eyebrows unsteadily backed up to the railing.

“Even when it is a villain it is not my will to take lives, but... this is unavoidable. I’ll cu... egh!”

His nose couldn’t take the odor and the flying ash. Sneezing in the middle of his signature speech is Yuuri’s very first accident.

“Your Majesty... your nose. Your nose is running.”

“Ugh, how annoying!”

He blows his nose on the tissue his guardian hands him. How he’s going to adlib after this is going to prove his worth as the Demon King. Wolfram desperately tries to help his friend in need.

“What are you doing, Conrart!? As a guardian, this is when you need to tell one of your lame jokes to fill in the pause.”

“... Ummm...”

“Like we have time for you to search through your brain now!?”

Not paying attention to the voices of others is also a Super requirement for being the Super Demon King. Perhaps because he’s against littering, he stuffs the wadded up tissue in his pocket before once again pointing at the villain.

“... Even when it is a villain it is not my will to take lives, but...”

It’s like a small segment of a show replayed after a commercial.

“... this is unavoidable! I’ll cut you down!”

Like the flashy cloud of fumes spouted out for the entrance of a special effects hero, right behind him a perfectly timed geyser shoots bam! right up into the sky, splits in three and comes back down. They’re transparent dragons formed out of water, or more specifically, the hot spring water. Two of them savagely jump upon the burning areas, the last one draws close to its owner’s arm before neatly wrapping around Luis Biron.



The dragon, wide as a reinforced concrete pipe, swallows him whole and sends him down

the tube to its stomach. Right around where 'Justice' was written. The appearance of the man with his arms flapping around his lower back is not unlike that of a grotesque sea angel.

"This is strange," Wolfram murmured with a skeptical expression.

"Dragons? It's strange; there's no way his magic could be so refined."

"Wolf, I think that's a bit rude."

"No, it's clearly strange. Ah, did he get a lover!? And now he's trying to show his good side..."

"... That's so cool..."

He turns at the fascinated whispers of the girl. He had completely forgotten she was there, but Greta's eyes are filled with admiration and respect.

"So he's trying to show his good side to his daughter."

It seems he's become aware of himself as a parent.

Underneath the feet of the Demon King standing like a model is the hot spring's mark shining in the 'mystery circle.'

(1) Takabayashi-sensei may have not been able to use the exact name in her book, but she's talking about the Toei Uzumasa Movie Village in Kyoto which is a film set/theme park. It's pretty much a town that they use as a backdrop for filming historical movies/shows that they also open to the public to explore and watch plays and other fun stuff. It's actually pretty cool looking.

Chapter 9

In my mind, Moeyo Dragons is playing over and over again.

And not the new version from '99, but the version that Eiji Bandou sang. I hate the Ce League, I hate it, I really hate it, but I'm still chuckling over the Super Hitoshi going boshoot.

"Uh... ugh, Eiji Bandou is, Makoto Nonomura is..." (1)

"Are you having that dream again?"

Light reaches my optic nerves and even the underside of my eyelids turn white. Bearing my pain and opening my eyes, I see that right above me are shining golden hair and lake's bottom green blinking down at me. If only he was a girl, I'd deal with his attitude and go out with him.

"... but anyway... uwah! Why did you put my head on your lap again!?"

Rolling across the grass three times, I distance myself from Wolfram's lap. My limbs are heavy and my throat is parched and there is an unbearable ache in the back of my head. Propping myself up with my arms behind me, I look up at the sky and take a deep breath.

"My head hurts. I feel like I'm going to vomit."

"It's a lack of sleep."

Citing this working class condition, Wolfram throws a towel at me.

"Wipe your face; there's still some drool on it. After using that much magic, usually you would rest a long time, but today you haven't even slept for half that. Headaches and nausea are a given."

"Magic... That's right, the fire!? What happened to Biron!?"

With a slow and cautious gait, Greta brings me water. Pressing the wooden cup to my mouth, she looks at me with concern. No one would believe that she tried to kill me a few days ago.

"Hyscliff brought Luis Biron to the authorities. The fire at the brothel was also extinguished. A bunch of sulfur-smelling water was dumped all over it, but you probably don't remember it anyway."

"No... hey, that's kind of weird. I *do* remember. Even though usually I completely-pon forget it all."

Oh no, I picked up that speaking habit.

It's only a vague memory like my view was obstructed by silk curtains, but it was like someone shot a short film and I was watching my own back.

"It was dragons, right? Right, so if Rokkou Oroshi is playing in my head, then maybe I can use tigers. It'd be awesome if I could just keep on using all 12 of the baseball team mascots..."

(2)

I started having some wishful thinking like, lions and eagles and water buffalo and Neptune are all strong, but I would like to hold back on the seagulls and the swallows and the koi fish.

But that's weird. Usually I'll hear a woman's voice and I'll lose consciousness.

"A woman's voice? Who's this woman?"

"That's my line! Just lie down. Try and regain some of your strength."

"But, I can't be the only one resting. Someone has to help Izura and Nina."

"They're both alive. The firefighters saved them!"

Hurriedly supporting me as I stood up, Greta presses Windpipe No. 1 into my hands. A cane isn't all that dependable on ground covered by tall grass. Checking the time on the digital analog on my wrist, I see it's just past two in the afternoon. It hasn't even been an hour since the race.

Burned down, there's nothing much left of the still smoking buildings. There are injured laid out on the grass in front of me, but they aren't being treated. Around ten of the young firefighters are silently continuing their work, but the onlookers were only watching curiously from across the street. It seems like they're so busy getting together and chatting, they don't have any time to help out.

"Where's the doctor? How come there's no doctor?"

Of course, there was a group of medics, but there were so many injured, they couldn't handle them all. It's amazing how few girls were packed into that building. There were about a hundred of them silently hanging their heads or sobbing or praying as they lie on their backs, waiting for their turn even though they didn't know when it was coming.

"In a blaze that intense, it's amazing no one died."

Wolfram lent me his shoulder. I didn't think it would be so tiring to not sit back down. I feel like I'm being crushed by the heavy air and like gravity has doubled.

"... Yuuri?"

At the minute and hoarse call from below, my knees fold under me.

"That's Yuuri's voice, isn't it?"

"Izura? Your face... it's covered in soot so I didn't recognize you."

Her blonde hair and sun tanned skin are all black. It's the color that the girls hate the most, the unlucky and evil color black. And it's not just soot. The eyes looking up at me are cloudy.

"I'm relieved, Izura, that you're alright."

"Hey, did you see Nina? We were together part of the way, but I can't see anymore."

"Your eyes... no, I haven't seen Nina. But I'm sure she's alright. There aren't any dead... there aren't any casualties."

"I'm glad. Yuuri, if you find Nina can you heal her like yesterday? Her cold hasn't healed completely and if she gets a fever again I'd feel really bad for her."

Her arms and legs are covered in blisters and bruises. Her eyelashes and eyebrows are burned and her voice is strange as if her throat is injured as well.

"Hey, before that, your..."

My hands are pinned behind my back. The ground I was gazing at becomes the sky. I'm suddenly as dizzy as if I did a 1000 knocks on a midsummer sports ground. (3)

"Your Majesty!"

"I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm just dehydrated. If I had a sports drink or something..."

I hear a voice from over my shoulder.

"Wolfram, I thought I told you to let him rest somewhere out of the way."

"Don't yell at me. He's the one getting up and walking around."

There's a burnt smell coming from Conrad's clothes binding my arms behind me.

"I said it before right? I mastered how to use Heal. It might just be for peace of mind, but I can heal some of the light injuries..."

"No."

Are you kidding?

I fail at trying to turn around and my head starts to hurt again.

"You're not going to say the same thing as with Hube, are you!? Besides, Izura saved me and I don't think of her as an enemy."

"Please think about how exhausted you are!"

"I'm fine! I said I was fine!"

Even I knew they were just words. Trying to concentrate is foolish. I probably can't even think properly. Like I'm recovering from the flu, I'm weak and aching and in pain.

But even so, with this terrible scene in front of me, there's no way I'd be able to just go to sleep. If there was nothing I could do I might hug my knees and watch, but I have power now. Even if it's just by a little bit, I've got enough power to ease the pain of others.

"Let go of me and let me do what I want! I just want to do what I need to do!"

"And then if you collapse who is going to heal you!? No matter how powerful the magic you have, you need to know your limits. If you excessively use that power without knowing them, the worst case scenario is that you'll lose your life! You can't abuse your body and soul again after using power you're not used to."

"But..."

In a voice she just barely got out, Izura calls my name. She tells me that she's not in that much pain and that I should rest.

"... Even if you're behind me, I know what face you're making, Conrad. I know that you're really worried about me and I know that I'm about to fall apart. But, these children are..."

Greta is walking around looking at everyone's face, searching for Nina. She's doing what she can to ease at least one of Izura's worries.

"... these children were suddenly brought here to a country where they don't know right from left. And it wasn't of their own will, it was something they had to do for their families. They don't know when they'll be able to go back or when they'll see their parents and siblings again. They don't know if it was worth it or if there were other choices or even if what they're doing is the best thing they can be doing right now. They don't know what's waiting for them or how much longer they can go on. And they can't even let anyone know that that uncertainty or depression is there! They have to be energetic and upbeat and amiable and laugh! And do you know why!? It's for everyone's benefit!"

I've never cried before besides when I was frustrated.

"You know why they have to endure so much for their friends and families? It's because they love them. It's because they're important..."

Right behind my ear, Lord Weller asked something of me. It wasn't a question, but a distressed utterance.

"Are you hurting?"

So slowly that even I got impatient with myself, I shake my head.

"... I'm not... hurting. That's not it. What hurts is that the result of what I did decided these girls' fate. It's all because of the stupid stuff I did in Svelera without even thinking about anything."

Am I losing control of my body, or am I leaning against him?

"So... I want to... do something. It doesn't have to be atonement. I don't care if it's unwanted or I'm yelled at."

Because, that's the 'Yuuri Shibuya' I want to be.

“... Let go of me.”

“If I let go of you, you wouldn’t be able to stand.”

It’s just like he said.

On the edges of my blurred vision, a vivid red jumped into view. Worrying that another fire started, I use all my strength to lift my head. It wasn’t fire.

“What is the meaning of this!?”

It’s a flaming woman.

A woman with flaming red hair tied high up on her head, with strong and confident steps, is weaving through all of the injured and coming this way. She’s holding three suitcases in one hand and has two wooden boxes on her back. With that height and her dainty arms and legs, she must be ridiculously strong.

“Anissina? Why are you here?”

“Before that, Lord Weller, judging from the black hair and eyes of this slovenly mess you’re supporting, it seems this is our beloved and respected king. Ah yes, it seems so.”

She grabs my chin as I stand baffled and roughly lifts it up to meet my gaze.

“It has been a while, Your Majesty, not since the day of the coronation. Although as the lowest member of the ten noble families, I never really cared much about ever meeting Your Majesty. Although now that we have met, I am glad to see Your Majesty the Demon King is in good spir... well I suppose not. Why are you so worn out?”

I’ve met dozens of nobles, but someone this unreserved is bizarre. I can’t say I’m getting any cold feelings from her overly brisk way of talking, but I’m not seeing any ill will or depravity in her intelligent light blue eyes either. What’s lying there is curiosity and the love of the pursuit. It’s a strong feeling of believing in herself.

“... It was just a little bit of self-loathing.”

“Self-loathing! A worthless emotion, but Gwendal sometimes uses that expression. It is an escape route that men use all the time!”

I want this person’s user manual. Conrad hesitatingly interrupts.

“Anissina, now’s not the time to-“

“More importantly, just what exactly is this scene!? Did the foolish men finally work up a conspiracy and begin attacking the noble and wise women!? If so, Anissina von Karbelnikoff, despite my poor ability, will have to take up the post at the women’s military camp!”

She’s not even trying to listen to what people are saying.

“I decided to go on a journey and was on a ship from Karbelnikoff to Munschtettner – it was on a magic-powered quaternary ship, my best work – when an out of season, strong wind caught the sails and I ended up being carried to this uncharitable land. Oh that wind was irritating. To think that I would be made a fool of by a random wind after studying all the weather maps and sea routes!”

“Like I said, Anissina, now’s not-“

“However! It must be fate that things happened this way. Because I have already been brought here, I will do something worthwhile and instill some awe and reverence of the demons. Now, I suppose I will start with treating the wounded.”

Eh!?

“You’re going to heal them, Miss Anissina!?”

“Ah, Your Majesty, I had heard from Lady Celi that you have powerful magic. Then why are you just standing around? Is this not a perfect opportunity to test your abilities? You can just fly through healing a hundred people. Now let us start with you, right in front of us.”

The Red Devil sits down and takes Izura’s hand, whose head she had placed on her lap.

“Where does it hurt?”

“I don’t really hurt anywhere, but... I... I can’t see. Will my eyes never get better? I wonder if I’m never going to run again.”

“Well, I do not know. Let us focus on the blisters on your arms and legs as they are at most risk of getting infected. If it is because of the trauma of fire and smoke, vision will usually return, but even if it does not, it is not such a horrible thing.”

Greta is jumping around in the distance. I wonder if she found Nina.

“... A friend of mine was not blessed with vision at birth, however just by a light touch of her fingertips, she could read anything. You should become like that too. That is if your vision does not return, however.”

“I can’t read at all.”

“Then you should learn starting now. Not being able to read and write is inconvenient, is it not?”

“I can’t.”

I’m slowly lowered to the ground and I lay a hand on Izura’s hair as she hides her face in Anissina’s lap. Anissina doesn’t wait for or expect a response as she holds the girl’s wrist.

“... Even if I go back home, they’ll tell me that women don’t need to read.”

“That is true. Even in the country I was raised in we were told something similar. Men should act like men and women should act like women. However the amusing part is that they do not tell us what sort of woman we should act like. The result is that everyone does whatever and the question of which way is ‘right’ hasn’t been answered in over 2000 years.”

And the result of those teachings is Anissina and Cecilie.

Greta comes running out of breath with her cheeks reddened from the cold wind.

“I found Nina. But she’s completely exhausted.”

The woman who was part of The Great Demon Kingdom’s Three Great Witches gently rubbed Izura’s fingers.

“Ah, you have very delicate fingers. Do you want to learn how to knit? Well now, you will be fine with your own natural healing and human medical treatment. Have your vision healed by that person there.”

“Anissina, His Majesty is very tired...”

“That sort of overprotection makes weak men. Just use your magic until you collapse.”

Except for her, there aren’t any women who would be able to pull off that broadly grinning laugh.

“Or should I carry him home?”

Anissina von Karbelnikoff straightened up and moved to the next patient. Perhaps thinking she could help, Greta trots after her.

I shamefully sit there and watch the back of her gallant figure. A slightly problematic hormone started to secrete in my disorderly brain.

“... She’s kinda... really great... Miss Anissina.”

Never mind Conrad, Wolfram, who would usually be hysterically raving at me, pats me on my shoulder with a pitying look. It was a silent warning: don't be fooled. It's too late now.

"Mr. Mitsuemon!"

Mr. Shiny holds a hand up towards me, the afternoon light shining off of his dazzlingly bright bald head. He's a little short, but when it comes to his energetic words and conduct, he's much more suitable a leader than I am. He's playing a very active part as the son-in-law of his wife's family, but I think it might have been better if he inherited the throne in Cavalcade. If he did, then our diplomacy problems with Cavalcade would be resolved.

"How are you feeling? Oh but I was impressed, Mr. Mitsuemon. Compared to your technique last time, the slightly mischievous part completely disappeared and it was all the more splendid. I wonder if it's because you've born a splendid daughter and you've become aware of yourself as a parent."

I didn't really give birth to her.

"But, about your daughter..."

"Greta? What about her?"

He strokes his moustache and sits down next to me for my own benefit as I wouldn't have been able to stand. He crosses his legs on top of the grass without worrying about getting grass stains.

"According to my subordinates, it seems that the names of your daughter's birth parents are engraved on her shoulders. Forgive me if this offends you, but the supervisor of the bathhouse is required to report those with tattoos."

So he wouldn't be able to work there if he was distracted by those dangerous swimsuits. I desperately try and force my brain, which is on the edge of becoming just a sea of cotton, to remember.

"Oh right, her mother's name was on her right shoulder. Greta's mother's name is Izura..."

I tell the now blinking girl next to me that I'm not talking about her.

"Izura... as I thought."

For a moment, Hyscliff's face becomes serious. His light brown eyebrows come together and a short hum comes out from his lips under his moustache.

"Mr. Mitsuemon, I assume you are already aware of this, but perhaps your daughter is a survivor of the imperial family of the abandoned country Zorashia."

"Abandoned country... eh!"

A survivor of the imperial family!? In other words, that imperial family left Greta behind and then got wiped out? So she was a princess? She tried to assassinate me even though she's a princess!?

In place of me who was tired and whose mind was in shock, Conrad continued the conversation. It's times like this where having a trustworthy subordinate comes in handy. Because, he's perfect for everything except for making jokes.

"I see, so having the names of your parents engraved on your shoulders is a custom of the imperial family of Zorashia. Which means that Greta's mother married into the family as the third wife and was Izura, the youngest princess of Svelera."

"... The princess was an openhearted person so she was very popular in the country. So, everyone wanted to name their children 'Izura' if they had a daughter."

Underneath my palm, her bony back shakes slightly. It must be because she's thinking about her family and home.

"Then wait, how come Greta was in Svelera? Did she become the adopted daughter of her uncle and his wife? Then she wouldn't have to say she was my hidden child... ah, I'm going to have to get acknowledgement from her former parents!"

"That is not necessary."

Hyscliff looks around for the flashy red hair and then lowers his gaze to the child running around after her.

"Izura's daughter Greta was sent to Svelera as a hostage. It was in the middle of the civil war and they were being attacked and the Empire of Zorashia was on the verge of being destroyed so in order to avoid getting attacked by Svelera, she was sent there as a hostage... However, a half a year later, the populace gained control of the government. Perhaps Princess Izura did it in preparation for what she knew was to come. Perhaps she sent her beloved daughter to her home country in the hopes that she would survive."

"That... I wonder if Greta knows."

"Most likely."

Hyscliff raised his face and broke the following long silence. He had a tone of voice that signified he personally believed this to be the best course of action.

"So how about it, will you leave that young lady to me?"

"What do you mean, so suddenly?"

"It might be fine for her to stay innocent at the moment, but she can't erase the fact that she was born with the blood of the imperial family and the destiny that entails. One day she may want to revive her lost country or even serve as a living witness to history. It will make an enormous difference if she is taught the ways of a human imperial court. Luckily my daughter Beatrice is also receiving such an education for half of the year in Cavalcade. If Mr. Mitsuemmon would agree to it, I would love to have your daughter learn in my home country-"

"As a hostage? Are you telling me to hand over Greta as a hostage again?"

Hyscliff from Misshinai abruptly stops talking and a look of indignation crosses his face. However, he immediately suppresses his emotions and continues in the same tone of voice.

"It won't be as a hostage. I am proposing a student exchange from The Great Demon Kingdom to Cavalcade. Of course, as a parent I would like nothing more than for her to become Beatrice's good friend as a classmate, but overlooking that, what she would gain would not be trivial. I am aware of the rudeness of this assumption, however... I believe that it is difficult for one to learn everything about the world from simply the teachings of the demons..."

Wolfram looks like he's about to explode, but because Conrad was between them, he couldn't get a hold of him.

"Of course, it is also hard to raise a personality with impartial judgment with only the education we humans provide. That is why I would like your daughter to learn in both countries and become mediator between them."

His opinion was 80% right. Even if I just brought her back to The Great Demon Kingdom, there wouldn't be anyone to teach her about human history or the etiquette of the imperial court. If I left it up to Günter and the other tutors and raised a human girl with the doctrines of demon supremacy, it wouldn't be outright oppression, but I'd still feel guilty.

Even if I ask for the right advice, Wolfram just gets angry and Conrad says shortly in his usual manner that I should decide.

"Were you talking about me?"

The face of the girl who came running back at top speed looked healthier than anyone else's here. She was purer than anyone and full of life and endless possibilities.

"Greetings young lady, I was just talking with your father-"

"Greta, will you go with Mr. Hyscliff?"

"Eh?"

She is unable to understand the sudden proposal and her eyes widen as if she was suddenly attacked.

"Will you go to the country Mr. Hyscliff was raised in and study with his daughter?"

"... Why?"

"Beatrice is seven this year and is learning about world history and culture and art in a school in Cavalcade. She's learning about international relations and how to be a queen so for half of the year, she leaves her parents and goes to study in the country her father was born in. If you want, you can go there-"

"No!"

Before I even started talking, I had decided that if she didn't want to then I would immediately turn down the offer.

Greta is clenching her tiny fist and with shaking lips, makes an objection.

"Yuuri, you said that I'm already your child, that Greta is already your child! Then why are you giving me away to another country saying it's for the best!? Are you giving me the same reasons that my mother did and doing the same thing too!?"

"No I'm not, Greta."

"But it's the same! You're giving me to another country! It means you don't want me anymore."

"I said it's not the same!"

"It *is* the same."

Wondering when she learned how to speak so un-cutely, I stop in surprise. But the one who spoke was Wolfram as he kicked at the ground in exasperation. (4)

"How thick can the two of you be? Seriously, like parent, like child."

"Wolf, this isn't about you-"

"The reason her mother sent her to Svelera and the reason you're leaving her in the care of this 'baldy' is the same."

Ah, he said something he shouldn't have said. But let's ignore that for the moment.

This ex-prince and third son who has a super beautiful mother and two manly older brothers does everything with pride and he had faith in the love that he was showered with.

"I'm doing this with your benefit in mind."

And anyway, in what world is there a mother who would do something that wouldn't benefit her child? Your knowledge in that area is really lacking. Moreover, no matter how hard this boring and uncool brat tried she'd never be able to do anything for her country. Because you're a wimp who can't even comprehend that, I can't even let you go on a trip without me. Hey Yuuri, and you, brat, are you listening?

We weren't listening. Greta was crying and I was enduring it.

"... That's right. I thought that that would be best for you."

Damn it, if I make a kid cry, it makes it look like I'm doing something bad! And if my daughter cries, it makes me want to cry too!

"I thought that rather than you living amongst only demons, you should spend half your time experiencing a human society and the other half you can live in our country and then you can try out both, I mean, you can have an unbiased look at both. But if you don't want to, that's alright. You can just come back to the capital with me."

"... Am I going to be baldy's child?"

Whoa, and there's that unspeakable word again.

"... Am I going to be shaved bald too?"

Everyone present waves their hands in denial and goes 'no, no' like the punch line to a joke.

"That's stupid, Greta. You're my hidden child, right!? I'm not gonna let you become a child of Mr. Shiny!"

"Re-really..?"

"Even if we're far apart, you're still my child and even if it's not together, a family is still a family, right?"

"Yeah."

"Even if you go somewhere no one's been before, you can proudly say that 'I am the daughter of Yuuri Shibuya of The Great Demon Kingdom' in a loud voice. If you want to come back, you can just come back whenever you want. If you want to see me, you can come see me whenever you want. Until you reach the age when you graduate from childhood, you can even think about me and cry a little."

"Okay."

A small, flexible and warm body jumps on me who was unable to stand. I tried to pet her instant noodle hair, but I don't have the spare strength to lift my arms anymore and all I could do was feel the hot tears of the girl who had buried her face in my shoulder.

Without paying attention to our mini-drama, Anissina and the firefighters continue their work.

Bent at the waist, an old man with a twisted headband comes pulling a food cart from across the street. As I'm about to fall asleep with a child wrapped around my neck, the man sees me and calls out.

"Hey brother! You look hungry, neil!"

"... The last thing I ate with my mother was fresh hinomokou, too."

"Ah, that was Zorashia palace food."

Several tired workers head towards the food cart. Even the onlookers who have gotten a chill simultaneously start digging around in their pockets for small change to get some hot food.

The old man waves away the onlookers and starts handing food only to the firefighters.

"What are you doing? You're a shopkeeper who's got no sense for making a profit."

"Or maybe we should say he's a chivalrous man."

Conrad stands lightly and went over to get some noodles or challenge the man. Greta and I ate last night, but there was a girl who ran away without eating a single bite.

"Izura."

"What?"

She brushes away the endless tears from the smoke and her gaze definitely finds mine.

“Can you see?”

“... Vaguely. Just enough to make out shapes.”

“I’m glad. Hey, are you and Nina going to go back to your country?”

“Yeah, but you know...”

She wipes her hands off on her lap and lightly slaps her own face. At first glance, the action seems to be to like she’s trying to liven herself up and saying, ‘cheer up.’

“But, if there’s better work here, I’d like to stay and work some more. I mean, there’s nothing in Svelera and my parents and siblings need money. And...”

Even if it’s not together, a family is still a family, right?

(1) Holy crap these paragraphs. They were just so full of completely related, footnote-able stuff I’m making this a multi-part footnote. And they were also short enough so you wouldn’t go WTF!?! for too long ^-^ However if you ever encounter something that makes you go WTF and I have, for some reason, not footnoted it, your safest bet is to think baseball! XD

- Moeyo Dragons is the theme song of sorts of the baseball team, Chunichi Dragons. Eiji Bandou is an entertainer and former player of said baseball team. Here’s a [video from Youtube](#) in case you wanna hear it.
- Ce League is short for Central League, and it’s one of the two professional baseball leagues in Japan. Yuuri has mentioned that he’s a fan of the Pa League (Pacific League). After the league championships, the winning teams from each league play against each other so it’s safe to say that the leagues are in direct competition with each other.
- Super Hitoshi going boshoot is from a quiz show called ‘Hitatsu Sekkai Fushigi Hakken!’ (Discovery of the World’s Mysteries). The currency in this show is little dolls they call Hitoshi Dolls and there are different varieties – one of which being the Super Hitoshi. Boshoot is a made up word from the Japanese ‘bosshuu’ (confiscation) and garbage chute. Players on this show bet a Hitoshi Doll for each question and whoever gets it wrong gets their Hitoshi Doll thrown down a garbage chute with a BOSHOOT! What’s that got to do with Yuuri hating Ce League? Eiji Bandou was in the show so basically Yuuri’s like “I hate you, but it’s funny when you get questions wrong and lose your dolls.”
- Makoto Nonomura is also on the above show.

(2) Rokkou Oroshi is the theme song for the Hanshin Tigers. So much baseball! My mind can’t take it XD

(3) Baseball again! 1000 knocks is baseball training. Someone hits a ball out and they have to quickly catch it and get it back to home base. This is called ‘one knock.’ So they do it a bunch of times and it becomes 1000 knocks. In this case, 1000 is actually a way of saying ‘endless’ and they don’t actually count or anything, though. I feel like this series is forcing me to know more about baseball than I want to o.O

(4) I realize there’s nothing ‘un-cute’ about ‘it is the same’ in English, but in Japanese, it was said in a very boyish way (which is how Wolfram speaks all the time). The boyishness doesn’t

translate at all, though. Sorry? o.o

Chapter 10

So in the end, how did my sprain turn out?

I spent the next three days in Hildyard's resort town staying in the hot springs from morning to night whenever I had free time. By the end, I had gotten used to those scandalous bikini thongs and was in the dangerous frame of mind of being weirded out by normal swim trunks. That's so embarrassing I can't tell anyone.

When I had to part ways with Greta I was wailing in front of everyone, but no one laughed at me. Anyway, Hyscliff promised that he'd make her visit after a month. Now that I think about it, it's been less than ten days since that child appeared before me. When I turned to comment on the fact that it hasn't really been long enough for me to properly develop the emotions of a parent, I found Wolfram fiercely crying. (1)

Anissina stayed behind in the resort town. It seems like she's going to open a huge knitting and inventing goods shopping mall. Once they're healed, there will be around 100 young girls who knit and have delicate lady's fingers – as opposed to men's fingers. At night, she'll teach them how to read and about business practices and have them work in the afternoon so they can get an education and a steady income. Izura and Nina are also going to be a part of that facility.

"The only thing that will save these unfortunate women is an education." I can understand that much. It's very commendable. However, this came after: "And, when they're strong and intelligent, these women will rule over the foolish men and give birth to a wonderful new world!"

That speech is just a little bit sexist.

"I would also like to be granted with parting words from Your Majesty!"

"... Go... Good luck."

I didn't have the courage to disobey her.

The hinomokou shop is being placed in a corner of the shopping mall and it seems as if the preparation of the palace food of the lost country of Zorashia is being carried on with precise attention to detail. I'd also like instruction on the unique eating method of noisily slurping up one single noodle.

Possibly because I put in a good word for him, the old macho man with the twisted headband gave me the bowl that was his family heirloom. It's got a Chinese design and there's a dragon twisted up on the bottom. It's said to be priceless, but from what I can see, it's just a normal bowl.

"Apparently, you can see the future in the soup."

"No way. Maybe the past or even a past life, but how is it supposed to show you what hasn't even happened yet?" Wolfram said.

"That's right. I thought so too. Maybe if it showed a ghost standing behind you, right?"

The boat ride home was very relaxing and we weren't troubled by pirates or giant squid. However, the young crewman from the way here was on the ship again and it was a bit awkward in the beginning. On top of that, we didn't have my hidden child that we'd had on the way here, but instead we brought a completely unconscious man onboard. I wouldn't blame him for being suspicious.

Gegenhuber's life was saved, but at the moment he's simply 'alive.' His heart and lungs are both working, but it doesn't seem like he'll regain consciousness. It sounded like he said something once, but that was probably just my imagination. Especially since what I heard was:

"I am in your debt."

And that was it. Is he a samurai or something!? It was definitely my imagination. If only there had been some old-timey nuance to the way he said it and it would have been hilarious.

I wonder how sad Nicola is going to be. But if I carelessly ask that question, Conrad will be troubled. So, I do as I'm told and stay away from Hube's cabin. The middle-aged nurse we hire in Schildkraut takes care of him around the clock.

It was around noon, just when the temperature was rising, that I got back to my castle.

Because I had abandoned my work and escaped after leaving just a short note and figure that Günter must be in a really bad mood, I prepare myself as I enter the main room.

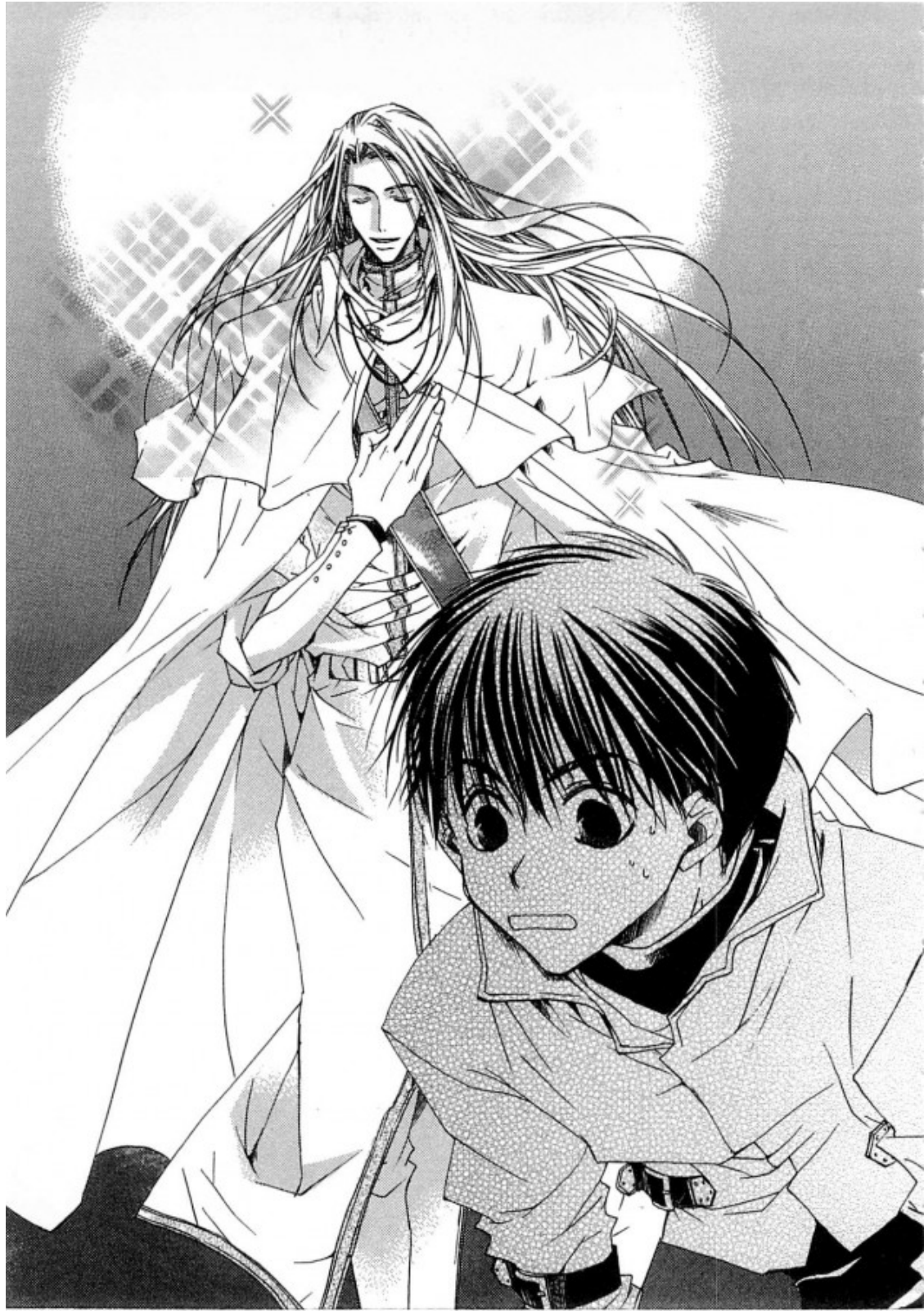
"Uh, Günter, no, Mr. Günter?"

"Your Majesty!"

He opened his arms as wide as possible making his already tall height even more towering and comes running at me... or not. Under his arms, he's wearing a strange, fluttering outfit that is completely wrapped around him.

"Ah, Your Majesty, welcome back. I, Günter von Christ, was looking forward to the day when I would be able to see you again."

"You're not mad? And, you're not even crying?"



There were no tears or snot running down his face. And on top of that, he immediately releases me and takes a step back before speaking.

“Mad? Why would you think I’d have that worldly emotion? Your Majesty, I’ve attained enlightenment. Love is to accept everything and to change yourself for the person you love. And, the hardships that come along with love are all according to His will.”

“Uh, yeah.”

“So Your Majesty, the days that I was unable to see you were a test of my faith given to me by His Majesty the True King.”

Clasping his hands together in prayer, he gazes up at the sky. It might be my imagination, but there seems to be a refreshing light coming from behind him. And I can swear I can faintly hear some soul-cleansing Healing Music coming from somewhere. Did he have some kind of twist of fate worthy of a ‘DUN-DUN-DUN-DUUUUN!’ while I was gone and now his values have taken a full 180?

“... What are you doing, Dacascos?” Conrad suddenly asks.

“Ah!”

Conrad lifts the huge box behind Günter. Inside, there was a completely hairless, middle-aged soldier operating a spotlight and a music box.

“Ah, Dacascos! Didn’t I tell you to not attract any attention!? Now my horrible trial period with the monks was all for nothing! What do I tell His Majesty!?”

“... I don’t really get it, but you aren’t enlightened at all... ah... I, I feel like I’m being glared at.”

Feeling a gaze that was almost painful, I turn around and see that Gwendal was standing there with unkempt hair and having lost so much weight it looked like he was cursed. The shadows under his eyes were telling a story.

“... *All of you...* do... your work!” (2)

I discover a pen callus on a finger on his right hand.

(1) The word for crying here that is used is a word that implies that you’re crying simply because someone else is crying. So, Wolfram is crying here because Yuuri was crying, not because he’s actually sad to see Greta go. I didn’t know how to convey that without making that sentence into something strange ^-^;;

(2) Another language related footnote. Actually, I’m surprised there weren’t more of these in the other chapters. ANYWAY, the word for ‘you’ that Gwendal uses is a derogatory way of saying ‘you’ in Japanese. In fact, it can also be translated as ‘you bastard/son of a bitch,’ if you were so inclined. It’s also written in katakana for extra emphasis (which is kind of like putting something in italics), so you can tell he’s REALLY pissed here. I left it as just ‘you’ because that’s what it is and I just can’t imagine him saying ‘you bastard/son of a bitch’ to the king. Although, the man *has* kicked a child before so I guess it wouldn’t be so unbelievable o.O;;

* * * * *

Wanting to see how my ankle was doing, we went out on a walk. I haven't run at all since the Hildyard incident, however.

Going off of our usual course a little bit, we climb up a gentle slope. At the bottom of the short hill, there's a carpet of green despite it being winter.

Conrad, not even the least bit out of breath, points to the end of the slope.

"Can you see it?"

There's no way I couldn't see it. It was huge and wide and right in front of me.

From under the green cut up in five places, a dark brown is peeking out. There is a coarse net attached to evenly spaced, wooden pillars. Several muscular young men were making a set of stands. The stands were about ten levels high.

On both sides of the fan shaped sidelines, there are benches for each team.

"... Wow."

"It's supposed to be a ball park, but since it's from my memory the shape seems a bit strange."

"Not at all. It's absolutely not strange at all. It's fine, there's definitely a hundred meters on each side."

Perhaps noticing us, one of the young men straightens up and salutes. The other two take off their hats and wave them around and call out to the other workers.

I unconsciously move my feet forward. Or rather, I started to run forward and failed and my whole body fell right on the hard winter grass and I tumbled down the low slope.

"Your Majesty, please be careful."

"I'm fine."

Whatever happens now, I'll be fine. Scolding my sluggish and tangled legs, I arrive at the stadium gate. It's not a dome or artificial grass that I'm used to seeing and there aren't any light stands or box screens anywhere. What's there is natural turf that little leaguers in western movies run around on and stands where the whole family would come and cheer on boisterously.

"... What do I do?"

What do I do now that this awesome baseball field has been built?

The young men who were working come running over. They all have the same serious look.

"Your Majesty, please forgive us for appearing before you in our personal clothes. Well, it's because we are off duty."

"Off duty? What are you doing if you're off duty?"

"Ah, we're making something called a 'ball park'..."

Lord Weller finally catches up to me and lets me off the hook by sending the soldiers back to their work.

"Why are they working so hard on their day off..?"

"It's because they want to make Your Majesty happy."

Faced with this truth I'm moved and my comprehension slows down. The organized green

and brown was the start of something beautiful and natural.

"But why are they making something so awesome?"

"For your birthday, your 16th. I'd planned on keeping it a secret until you announced it yourself, but... a lot has happened recently so I figured it would cheer you up."

Right field, center field, left field, third base, second base, first base. A mound not quite high enough and a home base that hasn't been put in place yet.

I felt like I could hear the sounds. I could almost see the blue summer sky come to life.

"They worked so hard because they want you to like this country."

"Why!? I like it, and for a long time too. I haven't said I hate it, right!?"

Conrad smiles a smile that pierces my heart and moves towards the batter's box.

"Yes, that's right."

I slowly move to stand behind home base and look out over the field. I can see everything from here. The mental state of the pitcher, the shifts of the fielders, the runner's starts, even the inside of the mind of the batter who is so close I could touch their shoulder.

This is my position. This is my place.

I carefully kneel on the ground, ready my palm and bend my elbow. From there, I lie down and press one cheek and ear to the ground. It was cold at first, but after a moment, the heat from the ground came through. The sunlight that lights this country is radiating from above and below the earth.

"What are you doing," Lord Weller asks in a laughing, cheerful tone as he pinches my left ear, "getting all muddy?"

"... Hey, can I say something boring?"

"Of course."

"I think, you know, that it's okay."

If I say something irresponsible like this, the demons would all definitely be displeased. But this is the answer I've come up with after thinking every night for four months. Anything more than this would be too much for me and even if I put it into words, it would be a lie.

"... I think it's okay. You can't have a visitor all the time. It's okay to have two headquarters and to have both Sapporo Dome and Seibu Dome as your homes. Although you probably... don't know what I'm talking about."

"I get the gist."

"Yeah, so... I might never be able to go back anymore, but..."

Even so I won't ever give up on my friends and family in modern-day Japan. Since I've become the king of this country in this world, I should sever myself from my past and think only of the demons. But that's not the kind of person I am and I can't throw away Earth or my family or my friends. I can't even throw away baseball.

"Besides, I came here because you wanted me, right?"

"That's right."

"Then..."

I have a place in two worlds.

There's no happier life than this.

..*.*.*

The effects of the hot springs appeared in a strange way. After coming back to Blood Pledge Castle, I was unable to forget those horrible three days at the hot springs and I got in the bath at every opportunity completely becoming a bathing fanatic. I even make do with the bathroom in the next bedroom when my large baths are being cleaned in the afternoon.

Because it's awkward to bathe alone in that huge bath, at night I make Wolfram come with me for bath time. I feel like if I spend time with him naked in the huge baths, we can form a friendship as men instead of he and his flirty fiancé. The problem is that as we're deepening our friendship as two bros, he's getting discouraged. (1)

Why, Wolfram von Bielefeld, are you so dissatisfied with friendship?

After I woke up paralyzed twice tonight, my eyes open and I can't sleep anymore.

"Ah, it's no use. I can't go to sleep without taking a bath. Wolf, I'm going to take a bath."

"Whadd're ya sayin, you know whatime it is? Stop bein' so annoying."

"This is kind of off topic, but your face looks like Kunie Tanaka." (2)

And you're completely rude by just ignoring the fact that you're living in my bed and saying whatever you want.

Reluctantly leaving my room by myself, I sneak down the late-night hallway. In this completely quiet castle where there's only the occasional sentry here and there, I'm a bit scared that there's something not of this world roaming around. This is basically a country of demons so monsters and evil spirits don't qualify as supernatural phenomena, but not so with ghosts.

When I finally got to the dressing room, I jumped at the faint noise of water.

From the bath where there shouldn't be anyone at all, I can hear the low sound of splashing water.

"That splashing noise is obviously not very adult so the chances of it being Lady Celi are small. If I had to say, it's someone with a light build..."

A child? A child's... ghost!?

A child's ghost just isn't funny! Or maybe it's a zashiki warashi from a private house. Or maybe a Japanese doll whose hair grows!? Or maybe a Hina doll whose head comes off!? As I go through the possibilities, they get less and less scary. (3)

But if a child really is drowning, I have to help them as soon as possible or it will be too late. I steel myself and open the door and run into the gorgeous bathroom. With only the few flames lit in the walls, I can't see the child anywhere.

"... um... ah! A doggy!?"

In the middle of the nonsensically huge bathtub, there's a shape that resembles a small, whitish animal. 'Hold on doggy, I'm gonna save you,' I think to myself as I heroically dive into the huge bath tub in my pajamas – which is actually just a t-shirt and shorts. My target: the 12 meter line.

I swim up to the small animal with a painstaking doggie-paddle and finally my fingertips meet fur. It's not moving so does that mean it's already used all of its energy!? Oh no puppy!

"Uh... this is... knitted!?"

It was too late by the time I noticed.

Something grabbed hold of my completely healed sprained ankle with a familiar force.

Without even time to think 'No way, my feet don't touch down here!' I'm sucked down into the center of the whirlpool.

By any chance is this that thing that I'm used to that always happens!? Is this that well-known attraction that has become easier for me to use since that one was made at Tokyo Disney Sea!?

I wonder if that white knitted animal is just sinking to the bottom now that I disappeared. That's a very scary, surreal scene that I have no time to be imagining.

After this, it's just the Star Tours I haven't seen in a long time.

(1) I realize the whole 'getting naked together to deepen our friendship instead of sexy feelings' runs counterintuitive to western thinking, but it's totally legit in Japanese culture and this wasn't meant to be funny or a 'Yuuri, you dumbass' moment :)

(2) Kunie Tanaka is an actor that's been in a bunch of movies including some of Akira Kurosawa's films. Fun fact: the character Kizaru from One Piece is based on him. This is what Kunie Tanaka looks like: (

[\[Pic\]](#)

)

(3) Yuuri is pretty much listing all the creepy dolls he can think of XD A zashiki warashi is a childish spirit that lives in houses and plays little pranks, but it also brings the house good fortune. You have to care for it or it will leave. The doll with the hair growing is a reference to the Okiku doll, which is a real doll whose hair supposedly keeps growing because it's haunted by the spirit of the girl, named Okiku, who owned it. Apparently, they trim the hair and it grows back. As for the Hina doll, well, a Hina doll is a doll which is part of a set of dolls that are displayed during the Hina Festival, or Girl's Day. They're said to collect bad spirits and at the end of the festival are set adrift to get rid of said bad spirits. As for the head popping off, that's just Yuuri being Yuuri.

..*.*.*

Suddenly, there's ultra-violet rays that instantly dry my wet skin and might even be able to burn some peach fuzz.

It's painful to breathe in the hot air and for a few moments while I got used to it, I was completely without oxygen. When my throat and nose finally get used to the temperature, I start breathing frantically.

"... buya... buya!"

What's buya? My cheek is getting slapped over and over again and my shoulders are being shaken roughly.

"Shibuya!"

"... ugh, Wolf, cut it out..."

"That's great! You're alive, he's alive!"

There's instantaneous applause. Startled, I open my eyes and the blue sky and the white gold of the sun assaulted my pupils. This deep and tall sky blue is a color that's only found in summer. Among the three faces peering down at me, I only recognize one. It's been so many months since I've seen him, but why is Murata here?

"Shibuya, do you know who you are!?"

"... Yuuri Shibuya."

"That's right, Harajuku Furi! Then what about me? Don't call me a weird name like you did before."

"Um... Ken Murata."

Again there's that cheering and applause. And on top of that, I hear some jeering whistling.

Struggling and turning my head, I see that I'm flopped on the Sea World stage like a tuna. The thoroughly amused parents and children who are here on their summer vacation are rejoicing like this is all their personal affair. Did I go on a Star Tours in front of this big of an audience!?

"... Is this kind of like 'tonight you are the eye-witness?'"

"Ah, but I'm really glad, Shibuya. You kept sinking farther and farther into the water and since we couldn't see any shadows or shapes, for a while it looked like you had been washed out to the sea wall."

Looking like he's about to start crying all over his glasses, Murata clings to my neck.

"I was so worried that the worst had happened since it was me who asked you out on a date!"

"Please stop saying such easily misinterpreted things."

In other words, I came back. I came home to my original world. It's not 'original' or 'coming home' anymore.

Yuuri Shibuya is now in modern day Japan. And in the future, I might go to The Great Demon Kingdom.

An older girl in a wetsuit grabs my belt in order to help me get to my feet and keep steady.

"Ew, what's that!?"

Damn! Today I'm wearing the demon's normal use, black silk thong!

"Ah, I'm sorry. That's kinda his thing. There's really no harm in it."

“Stop it, Murata! Don’t give an embarrassing explanation in public! Miss, miss, don’t be scared by this underwear, no, please don’t be scared!”

But, the girls have already branded me with the label of ‘pervert.’ They’re slowly backing away.

“Well that’s okay. The value of a human isn’t determined by their underwear.”

“Murata, that’s not helping!”

There would be so many people to help me out if I was over there. Ah, I’m really starting to miss it.

For as long as I’m here in Japan.

Like I think of my family when I’m far away, I’ll think of the demons while I’m here.

If I do that, then just by a little, my kingdom will be closer to me.